

HOW I BECAME A HINDU

(Reprinted with a Postscript)

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ONE

FROM ARYA SAMAJ TO MAHATMA GANDHI

*(I promised this intellectual autobiography to Hashmat, some twenty years ago. Hashmat wrote frequently in the Organiser under the general heading "Pakistan X-Rayed". It is years since I lost track of him. But I never forgot my promise. I wonder what I would have written twenty years ago. I wonder also how this story will shape if I wait for another twenty years. And I do not know what its worth is today. But I am impelled to write it because in today's India it is not sufficient to be a Hindu by birth. Hindu society and culture are under attack from several quarters. One has to be a convinced and conscious Hindu to meet and survive that attack. One has to find one's roots in Sanātana Dharma).**

I was born a Hindu. But I had ceased to be one by the time I came out of college at the age of 22. I had become a Marxist and a militant atheist. I had come to believe that Hindu scriptures should be burnt in a bonfire if India was to be saved.

It was fifteen years later that I could see this culmination as the explosion of an inflated ego. During those years of self-poisoning, I was sincerely convinced that I was engaged in a philosophical exploration of cosmic proportions.

How my ego got inflated to a point where I could see nothing beyond my own morbid mental constructions, is no exceptional story. It happens to many of us mortals. What is relevant in my story is the seeking and the suffering and the struggle to break out of that spider's web of my own weaving. I will fill in the filaments as I proceed.

My earliest memory of an awakening to interests other than those with which a young boy is normally occupied, goes back to when I was eight years old. My family was living in Calcutta. My father was a total failure as a broker in the jute goods market. But he was a great storyteller. He could hardly be called an educated person having spent only 2-3 years in a village school. But he had imbibed a lot of the traditional lore by attending *kathās* and *kīrtanas* in his younger days. His knowledge of Hindu mythology, legendry heroes, and the lives of saints was prolific.

One fine evening he started telling me the lengthy and complex

* This note was written in 1982.

story of the *Mahābhārata*. The narrative lasted for more than a month, each instalment lasting over an hour or so. I absorbed every event and episode with rapt attention and bated breath. The sheer strength of some of the characters as they strode across the story lifted me up and above the humdrum of everyday life, and made me dwell in the company of immortals.

The *Mahābhārata* has been my most favourite book ever since. I regard it as the greatest work ever composed. My yearning for reading this great story in print led to a funny episode a few years later. I was a student of the fifth standard in my village in Haryana. An Urdu magazine was publishing a verbatim translation of the *Mahābhārata* in monthly instalments. The only subscriber to it in our village was a retired veteran of the First World War. But he kept the series locked in his *baiṭhak* (study), and stubbornly refused to lend them even to his own son who was my classmate. The two of us watched his timings in the *baiṭhak*, broke into it via the skylight on the roof, read the instalments one after another, and restored them to their original resting place. The theft was never discovered.

The character that impressed me most in the *Mahābhārata* was, of course, Sri Krishna. His great words and deeds left me enthralled. The admiration was to deepen in later years till it became a worship. His holy name became a sacred *mantra*. Sri Krishna is the foundation, the middle, and the apex of the *Mahābhārata*. I am told by one who should know that Sri Krishna is the highest symbol of Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Power which the human psyche has thrown up.

But I was painfully surprised when a wise man in the village equated the *Mahābhārata* with *Ālhā-Ūdal*, and warned that the narration, even the possession, of these two stories always led to feuds and bloodshed. I have read *Ālhā-Ūdal* also, the entire 52 martial episodes rendered into sonorous verse by Matrumal Attar. And I feel very strongly that the comparison is absolutely superficial, and the belief purely superstitious. Hindus in North India have neglected the *Mahābhārata* for a long time. The very fact that the *Mahābhārata* has come to be equated with *Ālhā-Ūdal* in the popular mind in the north is indicative of a great intellectual and cultural decline.

To return to my story, while still in Calcutta I made my first contact with another mighty scripture, the *Granth Saheb* of Sri Garibdas. This Jat saint of Haryana has been the patron saint of my family ever since an ancestor of ours, who was the saint's contemporary, became his votary in the first half of the 18th century. We revere him as the *Satguru* (true teacher) who was an *avatāra* of the Highest Being. He

was totally illiterate but composed and sang some 18000 verses of very sublime poetry which scales the highest spiritual heights. The story goes that my ancestor would not have his first morning sip of water unless he had paid homage to the saint who lived at a distance of 4 miles from our village.

My father was able to acquire a copy of the first printed edition of the *Granth Saheb* of Sri Garibdas soon after it was published from Baroda. He would frequently read it out to my mother and myself with his own running commentary on the lives of saints and *bhaktas* as they were mentioned in the *sākhīs* and the *rāgas*. I also sat sometimes turning the pages of this work. I hardly had the mental equipment to understand the mystic messages. But the stories of some great saints like Kabir, Nanak, Ravidas, Dadu, Namdev, Chippa, Pipa and Dhanna were very strongly impressed on my mind, as also the stories of renowned Muslim sufis like Rabiya, Mansur, Adham Sultan, Junaid, Bayazid and Shams Tabriz. These stories were to flower into an abiding *satsanga* (holy company) in years to come.

During that year's stay in Calcutta, I also came in contact with the freedom movement for the first time. It was at its brightest and stormiest peak—the Salt Satyagraha. The atmosphere was full of Mahatma Gandhi and Bhārata Mātā. I sobbed uncontrollably as I watched the mammoth procession following the *arthī* (bier) of Jatindra Nath Das on its way to the Nimtallah burning ghat. The martyrdom of Bhagat Singh came soon after. I became vaguely aware that my country was not free. My mother told me that we were being ruled by a queen sitting on a throne across the seven seas. History for her had not moved since the days of Queen Victoria.

The Congress movement was never strong in my countryside which was dominated by the Zamindara League of Sir Chhotu Ram. But the Arya Samaj movement was sweeping everything before it. Almost all men of note in the village were Arya Samajists, including the half-a-dozen freedom fighters who had been to jail. The preachers and songsters of the Arya Samaj visited our village very frequently. I was very keen to attend these sessions, many a time late into the night. It was from their lectures and *bhajans* that I learnt my first lessons in nationalism. The point of this nationalism, however, was turned not against the British rulers but against Muslim invaders and tyrants like Mahmud Ghaznavi, Muhammad Ghorī, Alauddin Khalji and Aurangzeb. The national heroes were Prithvi Raj Chauhan, Maharana Pratap, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh, Banda Bairagi and Raja Surajmal of Bharatpur. They became a part of my religious con-

sciousness along with the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* and the saints and sufis of the *Granth Saheb* of Sri Garibdas.

The Arya Samaj of my young days in the village had three main themes to which they devoted the largest part of their programmes—the Muslims, the Sanatanists, the Purāṇas. The Muslims were portrayed as people who could not help doing everything that was unwholesome. The Sanatanist Brahmins with their priestcraft were the great mislead-ers of mankind. And the Purāṇas, concocted by the Sanatanists, were the source of every superstition and puerile tradition prevalent in Hindu society.

I never felt any animosity towards the Muslims except the Muslim invaders and kings already mentioned. Our house was in a neighbourhood full of Muslim *telis* (oilmen). Most of them had Hindu names like Shankar and Mohan. They participated in Holi and Diwali. Only their women wore trousers unlike the Hindu women of the village. My Muslim neighbours were gentle, quiet, unassuming and very hard-working people. We addressed them as uncles and grandpas as we addressed their women as aunts and grandmothers. An elderly member of their clan who lived alone in a big but deserted Hindu *haveli* (big house) was a very strong albeit a lovable character. I did not like it when someone passed unkind remarks about these Muslims on account of their religion, which was not unoften.

Nor did I lose my respect for the Brahmins. Some of them in our village were quite learned. Others inspired great respect by the dignity of their demeanour in the midst of great poverty. None of these venerable ones was an Arya Samajist. On the other hand, the president of the Arya Samaj in our village was quite a questionable character. He was president of the Congress also. One of his great exploits, of which he was very proud, was to defecate in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the village temple. I always avoided him and many a time turned back when I saw him coming from the other side of some village street.

But I did take very seriously the Arya Samajist denunciation of the Purāṇas and the Sanatanists. They became something tantamount to the effeminate and the immoral in my mind.

There was not much of traditional Sanatanism in my family due to the influence of Sri Garibdas, a saint in the *nirguṇa* tradition of Kabir and Nanak. Our women did keep some fasts, performed some rituals and visited the temple and the *Śivaliṅga*. But the menfolk were mostly convinced about the futility of image-worship, and did not normally participate in any rituals. The Brahmin priest was not seen in our homes except on occasions like marriage and death. The great religious event

in our family was the *pāṭha* (recitation) of the *Granth Saheb* performed by Garibdasi sadhus who stayed with us for weeks at a time. I remember very vividly how lofty a view I took of my own *nirguṇa* doctrines and how I looked down upon my classmates from Sanatanist families whose ways I thought effeminate. I particularly disliked their going to the annual *melā* (festive gathering) of a Devi in a neighbouring town. God for me was a male person. Devi worship was defilement of the true faith.

And I cannot help laughing even now when I remember my first encounter with a Purāṇa. *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* was the only Purāṇa known and available in our village. I had a strong urge to read it. But I was always afraid that I might get caught in the act. It was years later when I had left the village and joined a school in Delhi, that I borrowed a copy of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* from the local Harijan Ashram and stealthily brought it home. As I read it, I was watchful lest someone should see me in the midst of this indulgence and spread the story abroad. I did not find it repulsive in the least, though I thought some of the stories highly exaggerated. But on the whole it did not impress me. Sri Krishna of the *Mahābhārata* was strongly stamped on my mind. I found him missing in the *Bhāgavata*. His frolics with the *gopīs* (milk-maids) left me cold. I, however, lived to learn that the Purāṇas were an integral part of that mansion of Vedic spirituality of which the *Mahābhārata* was the crowning arch.

My interest in Arya Samaj brought me in contact with the newly established Harijan Ashram in our village. I was already a high-school student in Delhi. During the summer vacations a friend in the village asked me to join a *sahabhoja* (fraternal dinner) in which Harijans were to serve sweetened rice to caste Hindus. I went to the Harijan Ashram and watched the assembly which included practically all emancipated luminaries of our village. I did not share the meal because the Harijans who were serving rice and the caste Hindus who were eating it, were dripping with perspiration in that midday of a hot month. But when I came out and was asked by some orthodox people whether I had partaken of the “*chamār* (cobbler)” food, I did not deny it. Deep down inside me I wished that my hygienic inhibitions had not stopped me from doing what I thought right and proper.

It was perhaps this sense of guilt which took me to the Harijan Ashram a few days later. The man in charge was a member of my own caste and a veteran freedom fighter who had spent long spells in jail. He was very tough and devoutly dedicated to Harijan uplift. One could hardly discuss anything with him without his introducing the Harijan

problem into it. He made a deep impression on me, even though he was short-tempered and intolerant towards everything which he could not trace to Mahatma Gandhi. Seeing him taking care of a band of young Harijan boys, I often suspected that his loyalty to Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps secondary to his dedication to Harijan uplift.

It was this gentleman who told me that the *sahabhoja* had been organised not by the Arya Samaj but by the Harijan uplift movement of Mahatma Gandhi. And I was surprised, in fact shocked, when he told me that the Mahatma was not an Arya Samajist but a Sanatanist. He himself was a convert from Arya Samaj to the Mahatma's way of worship and thought. This revelation landed me in a great dilemma. My knowledge of Arya Samaj did not go beyond what its preachers in the village had told me. My knowledge of the Mahatma's doctrine was poorer still. But I was convinced that being a Sanatanist was something disreputable. How could a great man like Mahatma Gandhi be a Sanatanist? Yet I revered him with all my mind and all my heart. I had heard and myself shouted his *jaya* (victory) for several years now.

As chance would have it, the dilemma was resolved in the next few days, without any great intellectual effort on my part. One of my younger contemporaries who came to me everyday for lessons informed me that the *Satyārtha Prakāśa* was one of the several books he had borrowed from his school library in our district town. Copies of this *magnum opus* of the Arya Samaj were readily available in private homes in our village as well as in libraries in Delhi. But I had never felt any interest in it. Now suddenly I was eager to study it and find out what it was all about.

I do not remember at this distance in time my reactions to the learned discussions which the *Satyārtha Prakāśa* carries on many subjects. But I do remember very vividly the painful shock I received as I read its remarks about Kabir and Nanak. These were two of the most hallowed names I had cherished since my first awakening to a religious consciousness. I concluded that Swami Dayananda had been unnecessarily unkind to these great saints, and that his way of thinking was wrong. That was the end of Arya Samaj for me at that time. It was years later when I read Sri Aurobindo's *Bankim, Tilak, Dayananda* that I bowed, in repentance and renewed reverence, before that fearless lion of a man who tried his best to rescue and revive the Vedic vision among the Hindus. A true understanding and appreciation of the crucial cultural role which the Arya Samaj played at a critical juncture in our national life dawned on me simultaneously.

Two

FROM GANDHISM TO COMMUNISM

I had a brief encounter with the *Sthānakavāsī Śvetāmbara* sect of Jainism also, at about the same time. The school in which I was a student was a Śvetāmbara Jain school. The relative with whom I stayed was also a Jain. There was a daily period in our school for teaching the elements of Jain *dharma*. But the Jain community which I saw from close quarters was too decadent, self-centred, and morose for my taste. The lectures of some Jain sadhus which I attended in the local *sthāṇaka* (Jain hermitage) were narrow and sectarian, and never made any sense to me. What scandalised me most was the Jain version of Sri Krishna. He was portrayed as a crook. I was told that Sri Krishna had descended into the fifth hell for the killings in which he had indulged and that he was still there. I had to wait for years before I came to understand Bhagvan Mahavira and Jainism via my understanding of the Buddha and Buddhism. Both of them, I found, had scaled the same Himalayan heights of the soul.

A friend and classmate one day gave me biographies of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda written by Romain Rolland. I was enthralled and felt strongly drawn towards Vedanta. The library in Delhi which I frequented had complete works of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ram Tirtha, in eight volumes each. I read all of them. But my gain was very little indeed. The mistake I made was to imagine that mystic consciousness, which alone could witness the truths of Vedanta, was a matter of mental, at best intellectual, attitudinizing. Both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were to come back to me in later years as embodiments of our great spiritual and cultural traditions.

Five paise of the old currency was not exactly a small sum for me in those days. But I gladly parted with it for a small-sized copy of the *New Testament* which a pavement bookseller had in his collection of old books. I did not know at that time that I could have acquired a much better edition—and that for the asking—if I had approached some Christian church or mission. I did not know any at that time. I read the gospel part of the *New Testament* immediately. The rest of it did not interest me. But the personality of Christ on the cross fascinated me so much that I bought a picture of Christ and put it on the wall of my small cell along with pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ram Tirtha. The Sermon on

the Mount intermingled and became one with the message of Mahatma Gandhi.

It was at about this time that I came in contact with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) also. Some of my classmates were members of this organisation of which I had never heard so far. They invited me to a function held in Gandhi Grounds on the occasion of Vijayadashmī. I was very much impressed by the mass drill and the torchlight procession that I saw. But the speech by Shri Vasantarao left me aghast. Amongst other things he said: "It is a sin and a crime to be weak. The Vedas had prescribed that a lion should be slaughtered in one of the sacrifices. But who could catch a lion? So the poor goat was substituted for it. Why? Simply because the goat was weak." I had often joined in singing Surdas' famous song, *nirbala kē bala Rāma* (the strength of the weak is Rāma). Jesus had also told me that the meek shall inherit the earth. This denigration of the weak and glorification of the strong, therefore, scandalised me at that time. I had to learn a lot from history, past and present, before I realised that Shri Vasantarao was stating a great truth. It is indeed a sin and a crime to be weak. It is only the strong who can fight for *dharma* and practise *kshamā* (forgiveness).

But as my moral and intellectual life was preparing to settle down in a universe of firm faith provided by Mahatma Gandhi, my emotional life was heading towards an upheaval which I had not anticipated. Let me hasten to clarify that this upheaval had nothing to do with love or romance. The dimensions of this disturbance were quite different. I started doubting, first of all slowly and then rather strongly, if there was a moral order in the universe at large and in the human society in which I lived. The sages, saints and thinkers whom I had honoured so far were sure that the world was made and governed by a God who was *satyam* (Truth), *śivam* (Goodness), *sundaram* (Beauty). But all around me I saw much that was untrue, unwholesome, and ugly. God and his creation could not be reconciled.

This problem of evil arose and gripped my mind partly because of my personal situation in life. In spite of my pose of humility learnt from Mahatma Gandhi, I was harbouring a sense of great self-esteem. I was a good student who had won distinctions and scholarships at every stage. I had read a lot of books which made me feel learned and wise. I was trying to lead a life of moral endeavour which I thought made me better than most of my fellowmen. Standing at the confluence of these several streams of self-esteem, I came to believe that I was somebody in particular and that the society in which I lived owed me some special

and privileged treatment. All this may sound ridiculous. But people who take themselves too seriously are seldom known for a sense of humour.

My objective situation, however, presented a stark contrast to the subjective world in which I loved to live. I was very poor and had to lead a hard life. My learning, whatever it was worth, did not seem to impress anyone except my teachers and a few classmates. Most people around me thought that I was a bookworm and a crank. My interest in Arya Samaj, the freedom movement and Harijan uplift had alienated the family elders in the village. I had even suffered physical assault from one of them. But the unkindest cut of all was that whenever I visited the home of some city classmate who liked me, his family people made it a point to ignore me as a village bumpkin outside the ken of their class. I was always so poorly dressed as to be mistaken for one of their servants. It took me a long time to forget and forgive the father of a close friend who chided his son in my presence for having fallen into bad company. I did not know at that time that our upper classes are normally very uppish and that their culture and good manners are generally reserved for their social superiors.

Over a period of time, I found that I was getting overwhelmed by a great sense of loneliness and self-pity. This black mood got intensified by my voluminous readings of the great tragedies from Western literature. Thomas Hardy was one of my most favourite novelists. I read almost all his works. The comedies of Shakespeare I always gave up midway. But I lapped up his tragedies. I knew by heart all the soliloquies of Hamlet. And I thought that my situation was summed up by the following stanza in Gray's *Elegy*:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

I was sure that I was one of those gems and flowers which would never get the appreciation they deserved by virtue of their brilliance and fragrance. I translated the whole poem into Hindi verse.

But, by and large, the problem of evil was occasioned by the cruelty, oppression, high-handedness and injustice which I witnessed in the world around me. I will describe only one of the many instances which revolted me. Our village had a large population of Harijans who, besides other occupations, worked as agricultural labourers also. Several other villages in our neighbourhood ran short of agricultural labour at harvest time. These villages, therefore, promised better wages than

those paid in our village. Harijans from our village naturally started going to the neighbouring villages, which was not to the liking of peasant proprietors in our village. A band of these strong men descended on the Harijan *basti* (locality) one day, demolished several Harijan houses and threatened to molest Harijan women if their menfolk did not agree to work exclusively in our village for wages determined by the village panchayat in which the Harijans had no representation. I happened to be in the village that day and went on a visit to the *basti* along with boys from the Harijan Ashram. I could not suppress my own tears when I saw a newly married Harijan bride stunned into tearless silence by the terror of it all.

At this critical juncture in my life, I made great friends with a classmate who was a student of philosophy which was not my subject. He was very well-read. But what was more, he had the gift of the gab. His company came as a godsend at a time when I was in great need of it. It became our daily routine to go for long walks along the Jamunā or on unfrequented roads outside Delhi, which was a rather small city at that time. During these walks, he gave me lessons in inductive and deductive logic, ethics, psychology and the various systems of Western philosophy. It was all very fascinating and a new world of thought and perception opened before me. I still regard him as one of my two great *gurus*.

In between, however, he would express his own views and judgments on subjects about which I thought I had already arrived at final conclusions. We had a violent argument one day when he denounced the marriage institution and opined that a man and a woman should be free to live together as long as they liked one another. But I felt murderous in spite of my devotion to non-violence when one fine morning he declared that Gandhi was the embodiment of all reaction. This was a new term for me. He asked me to read Yashpal's *Gāndhivāda kā Śavaparīkṣhaṇa* (post-mortem of Gandhism) and find out for myself. I had never heard of Yashpal nor did I care. I did not read the book till I became a Communist several years later. My friend was not a Communist at that time and never became even a Marxist in his life. But he was an admirer of the revolutionaries whom, he said, some people wrongly described as terrorists. I knew nothing about any revolutionaries or terrorists except Bhagat Singh whom Mahatma Gandhi had described as a misguided patriot.

My mental defences in support of Gandhism were giving way one by one under assault after assault mounted by this philosopher friend whom I loved as a remarkable human being and to whom I conceded a

superiority of intellect and knowledge. But I refused to share his conviction that this world was created and controlled by the Devil who off and on spread some grains of happiness over his net in order better to trap the helpless human beings. I was not prepared to give up all hope so fully and finally. But the evolutionistic explanation of the world, inanimate and animate, which I had read in H.G. Wells' *Outline of History* an year or two before, now suddenly started coming alive in my consciousness. So far I had remembered only some unconventional observations made in this big book, namely, that Ashoka was the greatest king in the annals of human history, that Alexander and Napoleon were criminals, and that Muhammad was some sort of a loafer. Now I started wondering whether this world was really a chance concourse of atoms with no purposive consciousness leading it towards a godly goal, and no moral order governing at the heart of its matrix.

Another nail in the coffin which Gandhism had now started becoming for me, was driven by the book *Gandhism Versus Socialism* which attracted my attention at the Sasta Sahitya Mandal bookshop. Till this time, I knew nothing about Socialism. The controversy between Gandhiji and Subhash Chandra Bose had brought this term to my notice for the first time two years ago. I had referred the matter to my friend in the Harijan Ashram. He had told me that the Socialists belonged to the Bomb Party and believed in violence. That had settled the matter for me. But as I read this book, Socialism underwent a tremendous transformation in my eyes. In the debate between a number of leading Gandhians and Socialists, the Gandhians had lost the contest. I was struck by the fact that while the Gandhians were on the defensive all along the line and were trying to prove that Gandhism was *also* Socialism, the Socialists were on the offensive and saying in so many words that Gandhism was not Socialism but something reactionary and revivalist instead.

Now I was in a desperate hurry to get a good knowledge of the doctrine of Socialism. It was a prescribed reading also for my next year's course in the history of Western political thought. But I did not want to wait till the next year. The syllabus for B.A. Hons. had Harold Laski's *Communism* on top of the books recommended for advanced reading on Socialism. I borrowed a copy of this book from the university library and sat down on the lawn outside to read it. Never before in my life had a book fascinated me as this one did. I was still reading it when it grew dark and I could read no more. I brought it home and it was late in the night when I finished it. It was comparatively a small

book. But when I woke up next morning, Gandhism was lying in shambles all around me.

Laski led me straight to two more books in quick succession. Both of them were proscribed by the British government at that time. But our professor of political science had both of them and gladly agreed to lend them to me, on the condition that I carried them wrapped in a newspaper and opened them only in the privacy of my room. One of these books was *Theory And Practice of Socialism* by John Stratchey. The other was *Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow. I found them as absorbing as Laski's *Communism*. Stratchey was to leave Communism later on and join the British Labour Party. Edgar Snow was to be denounced by the Chinese Communists as a C.I.A. agent. But these two books, while they lasted with the reputation of their authors intact, made more Communists in India than any other literature.

A desire to read Karl Marx now became irresistible. First, I read the *Communist Manifesto*. It was simply breathtaking in the breadth and depth of its sweep over vast vistas of human history. It was also a great call to action for changing the world and ending exploitation and social injustice for all time to come. What was most reassuring was that revolutionary action was only an aid to the evolutionary spiral of social forces towards an ultimate resolution of all class contradictions, inevitably and in spite of all opposition. I need not have read any more of Marx to become a Marxist. But I did read two volumes of the *Das Capital*, page by page. The meticulous and painstaking scholarship of Marx in the age-old and true German tradition taxed my mental capacities to the limit. But I was left in no doubt that he had built his case against Capitalism and for the Labour Theory of Value on a solid foundation of recorded facts and figures, and by an exercise of razor-sharp logic which left no loop-holes and no loose ends.

I do not remember if I read any more Communist classics or any other Communist literature at this time. I certainly did not read any Lenin or Stalin. Mao had not yet emerged as a Communist theoretician. Nor did I know anything about the existence of a Communist or Socialist movement in India. Day to day and practical politics had no interest for me. I hardly ever read the daily newspaper in those days, leave alone any party periodicals. Mahatma Gandhi's weekly, *Harijan*, was the only periodical I had ever read regularly so far. But that was not because of any political interest. The Mahatma's pre-occupation with moral problems was the prime source of my attraction towards his weekly. Marx had provided me with what I thought was a deeper solution of moral problems. An individual could not be moral in the midst

of an immoral society.

Then came the great confusion which I think must have happened in many other cases. From being a Marxist, I became a Communist, that is, an admirer of the Soviet Union. I had not read a single book about conditions of life in Soviet Russia. Yet I concluded deductively that the millennium promised by Marx after the proletarian revolution must have started sprouting in a country which was known to be Communist. As I look back, I am amazed at the imbecility of my mind with regard to concrete facts while it was so alert with regard to theoretical questions. But the ideological swindle did take place very smoothly, and without any resistance from any part of my intellect. So, when the Quit India movement was launched by Mahatma Gandhi, I found myself on the other side of the fence. I had no sympathy for the freedom fighters who were being killed by British bullets, or being herded into British jails. My eyes were fixed on the great battles being fought across the vast expanse of the Soviet Union. I had started reading the daily newspapers.

At the same time, I concluded that God as a creator of this world could be conceived only in three ways—either as a rogue who sanctioned and shared in the roguery prevalent in his world, or as an imbecile who could no more control what he had created, or as a *saṃyāsin* (recluse) who no more cared for what was happening to his creatures. If God was a rogue, we had to rise in revolt against his rule. If he was an imbecile, we could forget him and take charge of the world ourselves. And if he was a *saṃyāsin*, he could mind his business while we minded our own. The scriptures, however, held out a different version of God and his role. That version was supported neither by experience nor by reason. The scriptures should, therefore, be burnt in a bonfire, preferably during winter when it could provide some warmth.

There was a comic sequel to this declaration of my new credo. I was taking to a small assembly of interested intellectuals in our village. As I was unfolding my new vision, someone reported that the president of the Arya Samaj had left his home with a strong stick in his hand. He had also heard of what I was now preaching publicly. And he was convinced that I was bound to see God in a new light and change my opinion about God's role in the world as soon as the top of my head had a taste of his stick. I must confess that I was not prepared for this test. I, therefore, turned tail and left the village that very day. I hoped that the president's temper would cool down in due course. It did. And I was more careful in giving expression to my militant atheism before village audiences.

THREE

SEEDS THAT WERE TO SPROUT

Four years after leaving college I was ready to join the Communist Party of India when it declared war on the newly born Republic of India in February 1948. I conveyed my decision to my friend Ram Swarup, whom I had met after leaving college and who was to exercise a decisive influence on my intellectual evolution. He wrote back immediately: "You are too intelligent not to become a Communist. But you are also too intelligent to remain one for long."

This was a prophecy which came true. It was only an year and a few months later that I renounced Marxism as an inadequate philosophy, realised that the Communist Party of India was a fifth-column for the advancement of Russian Imperialism in India, and denounced the Soviet Union under Stalin as a vast slave empire. Before I tell the story of that transformation, I have to look back and point towards planting of some other seeds in my mind. These seeds were to sprout into life as soon as the spell of Marxism was broken, and grow into an abiding faith in Sanātana Dharma.

The first college teacher to leave a lasting impression on my intellectual growth was our professor of Sanskrit. This great language and literature was not my main subject in B.A.Hons. I was only supposed to qualify in it in a supplementary examination and then forget all about it. The prescribed course was the first four chapters of *Daśakumāracharit* of Dandin and a few cantos of the *Kirātārjunīyam* of Bhāravi, with some grammar and translation work thrown in as an aid. In the normal course, therefore, a casual student like me should not have attracted any notice from our Sanskrit professor, nor he from me. But we were fated, as it were, to fascinate one another. The outcome of this meeting was not only my lasting love for Sanskrit language and literature but several other decisive departures in my way of looking at Hindu philosophy and history.

This professor had spent several years in Europe to earn his Ph.D. He had also taught at Santiniketan for some time. But these were only his outer accomplishments which several other professors also had in their own fields. What mattered most to me about him was his vast erudition in the wide fields of traditional Indian philosophy, Indian history, and Indian languages and literatures. Every single line of prose and poetry in the prescribed texts was for him an occasion to launch on

a learned discourse in comparative linguistics, metaphysics, history, and what not. His contempt for modern Indologists was always as obvious as his admiration for everything which was traditionally Hindu.

He startled me one day when he poured undisguised contempt on Sir S. Radhakrishnan who, in his opinion, had tried to fit Hindu philosophy into the straitjacket of a conceptual framework borrowed from Western philosophy. I had not studied any Hindu philosophy so far. Nor had I read any writings of Radhakrishnan. But this was a famous name in which every Indian was supposed to take legitimate pride. The professor clinched the argument by stating that a man venturing to write on Hindu philosophy without a knowledge of Sanskrit was like a man writing a cheque without a bank balance. I was to discover later on that the professor was more than right in his indictment.

Another day he came down very heavily on the theory of an Aryan invasion of India in the second millennium BC. I had never suspected that this theory was a deliberate plant by Western Indologists, to prove that India was a caravanserai which no racial, religious or linguistic group in India could claim as its original home. Our teachers of history in school and college had always started their first lessons in Indian history with the advent of the wild Aryans who destroyed the cities in the Indus Valley, who drove the Dravidians towards the South, and whose warlike ballads were preserved in the *Rigveda*. The professor dismissed all this history as a cock-and-bull story for which there was no evidence, literary or archaeological.

It was the strong influence of our Sanskrit professor which made me stand up in protest when our history teacher traced the Bhakti Movement in medieval India to the influence of Islam. It was revolting to hear him quoting Dr. Tarachand approvingly while he taught that Shankaracharya was drawn towards monotheism due to his association with some Arab merchants who had settled down in Kerala towards the end of seventh century AD. The history teacher challenged me to write a rival thesis disproving what Tarachand had propounded. I wrote a rather long paper on the Bhakti Movement which took me an hour to read before a full class. The history teacher praised me for arguing my case very ably from my own premises. But he was adamant that a well-known authority like Tarachand could not be wrong.

I came very close to our Sanskrit professor who also cherished me as his pet student. He organised a Sanskrit Parishad of which he made me the first secretary. He could speak Sanskrit extempore and very fluently. He encouraged me also to write and read out my speeches in

Sanskrit. It was quite an effort in which he helped me. I succeeded and surprised many people who had never known me as a Sanskritist. I also had the opportunity to listen to some famous scholars who came to address two succeeding annual sessions of our Sanskrit Parishad.

But he strongly disapproved of my association with Harijan work. In fact, he was not prepared to believe that I could be engaged in such a “disgraceful” activity when one of my classmates who wanted to praise me before him lodged the first information report. He called me to his presence and put the question straight to me. I told him the truth. There was no reproach in his eyes or words. He tried gentle persuasion with some instances of depravity which he thought was hereditarily ingrained in a certain class of people. I had too much respect for him to enter into an argument. But I did tell him that I did not agree.

This great scholar and teacher fell seriously ill before I started moving towards Marxism. And he died before I left college. I wonder if I would have wandered into Marxism and atheism had I continued under his influence. I also wonder if we two would have ever agreed, one way or the other, about the problem of untouchability. But as I look back I am filled with gratitude for the seeds of pride in Hindu culture and history which he was the first to plant in my mind.

It was perhaps due to the strong undercurrents of influence exercised by what I learnt at the feet of this Sanskrit savant that I was never able to part company, fully and finally, with the ideals and idols of my earlier days. Marxism made me renounce my faith in God as the Creator and Controller of our Cosmos. But my reverence for Sri Garibdas and the saints and sufis to whom he had introduced me through his great *Granth Saheb* remained intact. I gave up Gandhism but not my veneration for Mahatma Gandhi. His spiritual strength and moral stature continued to cast its spell on me as ever before. And both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda made me bow my head in homage whenever their holy names were mentioned.

This split between my intellectual perceptions and emotional dispositions was also due to my incomplete acceptance of Marxism. I had accepted Marx’s Historical Materialism as an adequate explanation of the processes of human history. I had accepted his Labour Theory of Value as the source of all capital accumulated by human society. I could see clearly that the State was an instrument of class oppression. I could detect naked class interests hiding behind the cloak of social institutions, law codes and conventional morals. And I also came to believe in the inevitability as well as the desirability of the proletarian

revolution on an international scale. But I found it very difficult, almost impossible, to accept Dialectical Materialism as a valid view of the world process.

I had read quite a bit of modern Western philosophy to know that while Materialism was deterministic, there was an obvious element of teleology in Dialectics. Materialism and Dialectics could not, therefore, be reconciled. I had referred the matter to my professor of political science whom I thought a very good Marxist. But he confessed that philosophy had never been his domain and that he had never studied Dialectical Materialism. Next I had taken the problem to a professor of philosophy in our college. He confirmed my suspicion that Materialism and Dialectics were logically irreconcilable. I left it at that at that time. But the ideological gap continued to rankle in my mind.

Meanwhile I had added two more idols to the panorama of saints and sages in my private pantheon — Socrates and Sri Aurobindo. They made a great difference to my intellectual turn-out in the long run.

Plato who made me fall at the feet of Socrates, figuratively speaking, was a prescribed reading for me as a student of Greek political thought. But I did not stop at the *Republic*, the *Laws* and the *Statesman*, which three Dialogues would have covered my course. I read practically the whole of Plato in order to know more and more about the personality of Socrates whom someone had so aptly described as the first *satyāgrahī* (adherent to truth) known to the Western world. He finally rose to his full stature in the three Dialogues centred round the last days of his life—*Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*. His wisdom as well as the nobility of his character left me spellbound. This fascination for the personality of Socrates led me later on to translate and publish these three Dialogues in Hindi under the title *Satyakāma Socrates*.

My encounter with Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, came about almost inadvertently. I had heard his name from my father who extolled him as a great Yogi. My father literally believed that Sri Aurobindo could levitate as much as five feet above ground. But I had never read anything written by Sri Aurobindo nor was he on my list of masters whom I aspired to read some day. The intellectual elite in the college talked a lot about Spengler, Bergson, Marcel Proust, Bernard Shaw and Alduous Huxley, but I had never heard the name of Sri Aurobindo in this exclusive club.

Strange as it may sound, I was led to Sri Aurobindo by my interest in Sigmund Freud, the founder of Psychoanalysis. Psychology was not my subject in college. But my philosopher friend had aroused my inter-

est in Western psychology as he had done in Western philosophy. I studied all the six schools of psychology which were known in those days. But I was impressed only by the depth psychology of Freud. Our university library had almost all his published works till that time, including his voluminous case histories. And there were not many readers to take out these tomes. I could, therefore, study them at leisure. I wonder if I derived any intellectual benefit from them. What I remember is that I started seeing all sorts of conflicts and complexes in my mental make-up. It was something like what happens to an immature student of Homeopathy who starts suspecting in his own self the symptoms of all sorts of diseases described in the *Materia Medica*.

My morbid fears made me approach one of our professors who was a well-known psychoanalyst. He gave me a few sessions of free association, the therapeutic method prescribed by Freud. I do not remember that they did me any good. The professor must have soon found out that I was a victim of auto-suggestion. But I was surely surprised when one day he suddenly asked me if I believed in God. When I replied in the negative, he further asked me if I believed in a higher consciousness. This I could not deny without repudiating Sri Garibdas and the saints and sufis who always sang of a consciousness full of *nūr* and *zahūr*.

I did not know that the professor was a devotee of Sri Aurobindo. He was not in a hurry to reveal himself to me all at the same time. What he told me to start with was that though he had put all his good faith in psychoanalysis for quite a number of years, he had now come to the conclusion that yoga was a more effective method of dealing with mental ailments.

I knew next to nothing about yoga. I was only vaguely aware of the name of Patañjali as an exponent of the yoga system of Indian philosophy. But that was all. I had not studied any Indian philosophy so far nor was I inclined to do so. The professor recommended that I need not bother about the philosophy of yoga. All I needed was to make a start with some simple expositions of practical yoga by Sri Aurobindo. He also promised to lend me some books if I could not find them on my own.

My search for the writings of Sri Aurobindo led me to my old favourite library in Chandni Chowk. The college and university libraries had not so far acquired any of his works, perhaps because they had been published only recently. The library in Chandni Chowk, however, had quite a few of Sri Aurobindo's works. One of these was *The Life*

Divine. I immediately went for it, forgetting for the time being what the professor had recommended. And that was an intellectual experience which I will never forget. I still remember how I tried to read this great work by the moonlight on the roof when I found one night that my lantern had run out of kerosene. What impressed me most at that time was Sri Aurobindo's full and very fair exposition of the philosophy of materialism in all its metaphysical and scientific ramifications as well as life-meanings. Here was a mind which was as razor sharp as that of Marx but which at the same time covered a larger territory.

As I look back, I can see that the greater part of Sri Aurobindo's vast vision as expounded in *The Life Divine* was beyond my grasp at that time. The heights to which he rose as a witness of the world process and the drama of human destiny left me literally gasping for breath. But this much was clear at the very start that his concept of man had dimensions which were radically different from those I had come across in any other system of thought. He was not dealing with man as a producer and consumer of material goods. He was not dealing with man as a member of a social or political or economic organisation. He was not dealing with man as a rational animal or a moral aspirant or an aesthete. Man was all these according to him. But man was also much more at the same time. He was a soul effulgent with an inherent divinity which alone could sustain and give meaning to the outer manifestations of the human personality.

And the promise made by Sri Aurobindo regarding the ultimate destiny of the human race was far more stupendous than that held out by Marx. The international proletarian revolution anticipated and advocated by Marx was to lead to a stage at which mankind could engage itself in rational, moral and aesthetic endeavours free from the distortions brought about by class interests. But the supramentalisation of the mental, vital and physical nature of man envisaged and recommended by Sri Aurobindo would enable mankind to bridge the gulf between human life as a terrestrial turmoil and human life as a spiritual self-existence.

The conceptual language I am using now to draw the distinction between Marx and Sri Aurobindo was not accessible to me in those days. Most of this clarity is wisdom by hindsight. But howsoever vague and inchoate my vision might have been at that time, I did feel that Sri Aurobindo was talking about fundamentally different dimensions of the universe and human life. The gulf between my mundane interests and the grand aspirations dictated by Sri Aurobindo's vision was very wide

and I could hardly muster the care or the courage to cross over. But in the inner recesses of my mind, I did become curious about the nature of the universe, about man's place in it, and about a meaningful goal of human life.

My problem now was to reconcile Sri Aurobindo with Marx, in that order. Marx of course came first. He was the exponent *par excellence* of the social scene with which I was primarily pre-occupied as well as extremely dissatisfied. Sri Aurobindo had to be accommodated somewhere, somehow, in the system of Marx. The reconciliation was achieved by me several years later to my own great satisfaction. I came to the conclusion that while Marx stood for a harmonised social system, Sri Aurobindo held the key to a harmonised human personality. The ridiculousness of this reconciliation did not dawn on me even when a well-known exponent of Sri Aurobindo to whom I presented it as an intellectual feat dismissed it with a benevolent smile. I dismissed the exponent as wise by half because while he had studied Sri Aurobindo, he had most probably not studied Marx, at least not as well as I had done!

FOUR

SOME INTERESTING ENCOUNTERS

My plight was pretty serious after I left college. I was now a married man and the father of a son. There was a family to support which included my parents in the village. But I had not a penny in my pocket. I gave up the only job I could get as a clerk in the Central Secretariat after exactly 65 days because I was ashamed to be a cog in the British imperialist machine. My supreme aspiration was to be a lecturer in some college. But every interview to which I was called ended with the employers pointing out that I had no previous experience of teaching!

It was in the midst of this misery that I met Ram Swarup. He was my senior by one year in the same college. But I had never seen or met him in my college days. I had heard that some of the best speeches made in the college parliament by some student leaders had been written by Ram Swarup, and that some of the good poems contributed to the college magazine by a classmate of mine in his own name had in fact been composed by Ram Swarup. Thus I was familiar with the name but not with the face. I was also intrigued a little. Why did he have to hide behind another person for publicising his poems?

Meanwhile, I was drifting away in my intellectual perceptions from my philosopher friend of college days who was also out of college and unemployed like myself in spite of his first class in the M.A. examination. He could see no meaningful message in Marx. He had also what I thought to be a bad habit of arguing for the opposite side in order to bring out the best from the supporter of a philosophical system. He was, however, full of praise for Ram Swarup whom he had known. He had one day described Ram Swarup as the most impersonal person he had met.

One day a common friend invited me to a meeting over which Ram Swarup was to preside. I went to the appointed place and met him for the first time, face to face. I found him full of Shavian humour. His looks had a kind of beaming love for which I fell immediately. We became friends on the very first day. After that we started meeting almost everyday, sitting in a restaurant in Chandni Chowk or on the lawns under the walls of the Red Fort. The subject of discussion was a novel theory which Ram Swarup had evolved. At first I thought that he had got it out of his hat.

Ram Swarup admitted the validity of Marx regarding the role of class conflict in human history. But he raised a more fundamental question which I had not heard or read anyone raising before I met him. How did classes come to be constituted in the first instance? This was his question. I did not know at that time that Marx had an answer to this question. Classes, according to Marx, had arisen in the primitive communist society when means of production got accumulated and some people appropriated them to the disadvantage of the others. The owners of these means became the haves who now started lording it over the have-nots. But even if I had known this answer, it would not have satisfied Ram Swarup. His probe went deeper than that of Marx. How did the haves manage to appropriate the means of production?

So I waited for Ram Swarup to provide his own answer to his own question. He explained to me that classes were in fact the outcome of national conflicts in which one group of people conquered and imposed itself on another group and misappropriated the means of production. To his way of thinking, national conflicts had primacy over class conflicts. The secondary conflicts should not be allowed to obscure or obstruct the resolution of primary conflicts. *Ergo*, our national conflict with Britain had primacy over whatever class conflicts were present in Indian society. It was indeed a very dexterous use of a Marxian concept to outflank Marx. I could not meet the challenge or defeat the logic.

But I protested when Ram Swarup requested me to provide the historical facts to prove his point. He had not been a student of history like myself. To my way of thinking, facts came first and conclusions were logical deductions from whatever facts were available at any time. But here was a man who was out to reverse the process. I pointed out the illogic of it to Ram Swarup. He smiled and stated that to him the conclusions came first and that facts could follow. I told him that his way of thinking smacked of fascism. He smiled some more and looked at me with an expression of "so what" on his sharply intellectual face. The swear-word which made many intellectuals quake in those days had no sting for him. In fact, sometimes I suspected that he was a supporter of fascism.

This suspicion had some ground for me in his unabashed sympathy for the RSS which I had come to regard as a fascist organisation by now. Not that I knew anything about the RSS. I was only repeating what I had heard in my earlier intellectual circles. But Ram Swarup knew some RSS workers. One of them, he told me, was the manager of

a famous milkshop in Connaught Place. He permitted a sweeper employed by the establishment to serve milk bottles to the clients who came to this shop in large numbers. One day a Muslim gentleman objected to a sweeper being allowed to touch the milk bottles served to the gentry. The manager replied that he was a Hindu and that his religion recognised no untouchables. I was touched by this story. I wished that all Hindus could make the same statement. But I did not change my opinion of the RSS.

I wonder how I would have shaped if I had continued to live in Delhi and to meet Ram Swarup regularly. He was not a Marxist. But he was definitely an atheist who believed that butter was more important than God. He had read some of Sri Aurobindo and had come to the conclusion that yoga was an instinct for suicide. Obviously, the human personality for him at that time was constituted by the human ego. He had been strongly influenced by Bernard Shaw and Aldous Huxley and valued very highly an individual's capacity to look at himself, remorselessly and with the help of reason. He introduced me to these great writers whom I had not read so far. On the whole, he had no use for any conventional morality or code of manners and could see clearly how they were mostly used to put the other fellow in the wrong.

I am sure I would not have ended as a Communist and a neutralist vis-a-vis Muslim communalism had I continued under his direct influence. His letters written to me during my stay outside Delhi did influence me at decisive points in my evolution. But the impact of his whole personality, face to face, would have been much more effective. For he continued to evolve and grow under his own impulsion which was not the case with me. I needed to be pushed ahead by my betters. Moreover, his growth was faster and of a deeper design than I could ever manage on my own.

I had to leave Delhi in December 1944. My first job was in Bombay where I was treated very shabbily by my boss. I broke down completely and wrote some very pathetic letters to my relative in Delhi. After two months I left Bombay for Calcutta where I expected my father to find some new opening for me. He did help me get a job. But he could not save me from the scornful jibes of my relatives and countrymen from Haryana. They often contrasted my high education with my small salary and bestowed on me the honorific of *padhā likhā bēkār*, that is, an educated nincompoop. These same people were to hold me in high regard in later years when I succeeded in making more money. But in my early years in Calcutta they were a pain in the neck.

I have never been very much bothered about what other people say about me so long as I am true to my own lights and inspirations. Nevertheless, it was a great punishment to live in a crowd of people who cared for nothing except ready cash. I could understand them very well. I knew that they knew no better. I could even sympathise with them, prisoners as they were of a traditional culture which had suffered terrible corruption. But I could never understand their preoccupation with me as a scandalous subject. Why could they not mind their own business and let me mind my own?

A letter from Ram Swarup which I received within days of my reaching Calcutta was nothing less than a command and a directive. He wrote: "I have read your letters which you have written to your relative. I can sympathise with you in your situation but I cannot support you in your mood of self-pity. Society has given you nothing, not even the right to protest. But that is no reason why you should whine and whimper. I would like you to develop your personal predicament into a more purposive protest against the social system as a whole." This message was like a powerful medicine. I started trying to be more impersonal.

My job was that of a travelling salesman and it took me from Calcutta to Peshawar. I visited almost all important cities and towns in Bihar, U.P., and the Punjab of pre-partition days. It was a great experience, meeting people and seeing places. It broke down many of my orthodox habits. I was a vegetarian and have always remained a vegetarian. But I had never got used to different types of food and drink served by people belonging to different communities, including Muslims. One day I was shocked and felt very unclean when the Sikh proprietor of a hotel in Ambala told me that the water with which I had bathed that morning had been brought to the bathroom in a water-skin.

On my way from Sitapur to Lucknow, I was absorbed in an interesting discussion with a middle-aged Muslim gentleman about the existence of God. He did not know any English but spoke a very chaste Urdu. I was amazed that this language had such an extensive vocabulary of technical terms in philosophy. He helped wherever I could not understand the Arabic terms. A co-traveller was listening to us intently. As soon as he discovered that I was an incurable atheist, he enquired about the examinations I had passed and the divisions. I had secured. Then he concluded very contemptuously: "*Tusī mālāk nū nahīn manadē tavī pakhē bechdē firdē hō, nahīn tān innī tālim pākē kuī ōhdā nahīn pā jāndē* (It is because you do not believe in God that you are wandering from place to place selling fans. Otherwise your degrees

would have made an august officer out of you)." I retorted that I was prepared to believe in God if he could get a good job for me. The Muslim gentleman smiled benevolently on these crudities but kept quiet. These were hits below the philosophical belt. Obviously, he felt helpless. It was not his cup of tea.

On my way to Peshawar from Rawalpindi, I became a witness to a very violent argument between two middle-aged Muslims about the desirability of Pakistan. One of them was a Punjabi, the other a Pathan. They were talking in a dialect of the Punjabi language some of which I could not understand quite clearly. The Pathan clinched the argument by saying that Jinnah "*sālā sooar dā puttār eh*," that is, Jinnah was the son of a swine. The Punjabi rose up in his seat, red in the face, and challenged the Pathan to repeat the sentence. The Pathan kept his cool and remained seated. He stared at the Punjabi and said: "*Asī pher dasadā hāñ. Jinnā sālā sooar dā puttār eh* (I repeat that Jinnah is the son of a swine)." The Punjabi did not dare assault him, such was the self-possession in the Pathan's voice and face. Our journey to Peshawar was completed in benumbed silence.

On my way back from Peshawar I shared a lower berth with a middle-aged Englishman. He had just retired as a Major in the British army and was on his way home via Bombay. He was very gentle and had the British talent for understatement. He took a liking to me as we talked about the war which was now drawing to an end. He became a father figure for me after an hour or two and offered to share his lunch which I could not because I was a vegetarian. I bought something for myself from the platform on the next station. As he prepared to have his afternoon nap, in his own corner, I took out a book to read. It was *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* by Lenin which I had bought earlier from the Communist Party office in Lahore. It had the emblem of the raised fist on its cover. Suddenly the Major had a look of horror on his face. As a pious Christian he crossed himself and moved farther in his corner. But he did not utter a word. I immediately put away the book in my suitcase and did not open it or any other communist book again till we parted company at the Old Delhi Station. He invited me to visit him if I ever went to England and gave me his card which I did not keep for long because a journey to England was an unheard of dream for me at that time.

But the most important event during my travels was a visit to the Communist Party office on Mcleod Road in Lahore. My classmate whose father had humiliated me years ago had migrated to Lahore and

become a party member via the All India Students Federation. It was he who took me to the party office. This was my first contact with the Communist Party of India and its official publications. Quite a few of the young men and women working in the party office were from Bengal. They took to me immediately when I talked to them in my *bhāṅgā* (broken) Bengali. I bought a few books by Lenin and several party pamphlets, mostly on the subject of the demand for Pakistan. I finished reading all of them by the time I returned to Calcutta.

During my short sojourn in Lahore I had long discussions with my friend regarding the validity of the Muslim League demand for Pakistan. He was convinced and tried to convince me that the demand was just and fully democratic. But I had the large number of Sikhs and Hindus in my mind. I had met many and talked to them on the subject during my travels in the Punjab and the NWFP. They were all violently opposed to the idea of living in a State dominated by Muslim mullahs. But as far as my friend was concerned they were not the real people. He continued to talk of some progressive people who were united as brethren in language and culture irrespective of religious differences. I thought I was also a progressive. But I could see nothing progressive about Pakistan. The Muslim League was totally dominated by knights, nawabzadahs, khan bahadurs and fanatic mullahs.

On my return to Calcutta I told my employers that I was not prepared to travel any more, job or no job. They allowed me to settle down. I was a frequent visitor to the coffee house in College Street where I took to writing my first novel. I could not write in my small cell which I shared with four other people. So I acquired a habit of writing in coffee houses which lasted even after I had a comfortable home. It is during these sessions that I met a group of Bengali students who were members of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). They took me to their leader whose name I cannot recall now. He commissioned me to translate from Hindi to English some writings of Acharya Narendra Deva and Shri Jayaprakash Narayan so that they could be translated into Bengali. It was difficult to find a Bengali in Calcutta who could translate directly from Hindi to Bengali. I suppose the situation is the same today.

I did the translations very fast. I agreed with every word of what these leaders of the CSP had written. These were their writings from the early thirties when the CSP had not broken with the Communists. I was not aware of the serious quarrel which had divided them from 1940 onwards. I do not know if my English translations were ever rendered

into Bengali. But I earned the respect and regard of the socialist leader. He was a lean, thin and dark man of medium stature. He had been a revolutionary and had spent long years in British jails, including a spell in the Andamans. His living inside a dilapidated dwelling place in a narrow, dark lane was very austere. His shirt always had several patches on it. He sat on a small mat without any other accoutrements around him. Sometimes he smoked a *bīḍī*. But his looks were stern. And he was a man of very few words. He inspired in me a great respect bordering on awe.

His confidence in me led him to suggest that I become the editor of a weekly in Hindi which the CSP had been publishing for some time for the benefit of the Hindi speaking people of Calcutta. I was very diffident. This was a field in which I had no earlier experience. But he encouraged me. He told me that I could not do worse than the existing editor who, in his own words, was a mere matriculate from U.P. I accepted the responsibility and wrote the first editorial a few days later. It was my last for that Socialist weekly.

The leader could not read Hindi. But he could understand very well if something in Hindi was read out to him. He became very impatient as he listened to the earlier editor reading my piece to him. He sent for me immediately.

I was expecting a pat on my back for what I had written after a great deal of thought and polishing of language. But I was taken aback when I saw the hard-lined face of the socialist leader. He asked me point-blank: "Are you a Communist?" On my denying the charge forcefully, he protested; "But the line you have taken in this editorial is the Communist line. How do you explain that? The Communists had wormed their way into our party earlier also with disastrous consequences for our party. We cannot allow that to happen again. Not in the city of Calcutta. This is not a small town where some of our comrades may get hoodwinked by clever Communist talk." His temper rose as he talked. It was for the first time that I had heard him utter so many words in such a small space of time.

I do not remember the subject of that editorial. It was perhaps about the Cabinet Mission proposals. I did not know the CSP line on the subject—or any other subject for that matter. Nor did I know the Communist line except on the subject of Pakistan. I expected my friends from the coffee house to save me from the wrath of their leader. But their own looks had also become rather hostile. In my desperation I touched the leader's feet and swore by all that I held sacred that I was

innocent of any deliberate distortion. The great man cooled down immediately. He blessed me by placing both his hands on my head and asked me to come again for a discussion on different party lines. Meanwhile, I was to write no more editorials for his weekly.

I never met him again. The 16 August, 1946 communal riots broke out in Calcutta after a few days. I would have been killed by a Muslim mob in the early hours of that day as I walked back towards my home from the coffee house which I had found closed. My fluent Urdu and my Western dress saved me. My wife and two year old son had joined me a few days earlier in a small room in a big house bordering on a large Muslim locality. On the evening of the 17th we had to vacate that house and scale a wall at the back to escape murderous Muslim mobs advancing with firearms. Had not the army moved in immediately after, I would not have lived to write what I am writing today.

FIVE

CLOSE TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY

I saw quite a bit of the Great Calcutta Killing of August 16-17, 1946 with my own eyes. There were a large number of dead bodies lying on the streets. There were many more floating down the Hooghly. I saw an extensive destruction of private and public property by fire as well as by mob fury. The death and desolation all around moved me to despair about human nature itself. But I did not try to find the causes of this holocaust—or to fix its responsibility on the political movement which had provoked it. Instead, I wrote a long article, *The Devil Dance In Calcutta*, in which I held both Hindus and Muslims equally responsible for this meaningless massacre. The article was circulated in a cyclostyled newsletter which a circle of friends was publishing from Delhi. Some of these friends appreciated the graphic picture I had drawn and the literary flourishes I had displayed.

But the letter I received from Ram Swarup in the next few days was quite different in its tone. He had not appreciated my “sitting on the fences” and equating Muslim violence with Hindu violence. He urged me to see the right and wrong involved in what I had described as an internecine strife. According to him, Muslim violence was aggressive and committed in the furtherance of a very reactionary and retrograde cause, namely, the vivisection of India. Hindu violence, on the other hand, was defensive, and forced upon them in the service of a very worthy cause, namely, the unity and integrity of India, which was worth even a civil war. I must confess that I could not see the point. I was not prepared to forgive the Hindus for the orgy of murder in which they had also indulged. How were the Hindus in a better moral position, even if it was granted that Muslims had started it in the first instance?

A few months earlier, Ram Swarup had sent to me the type-script of a long dialogue, *Let Us Have Riots: The Philosophy of Those Who Want to Divide India by Street Riots*, which he had written in a Shavian style. Many prominent political leaders belonging to the Congress, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha figured in it. Dr. Ambedkar had also made his own characteristic contribution on the subject of Partition. I laughed hilariously as I read it again and again. The Muslim League leaders, particularly Mr. Jinnah, had made themselves thoroughly ridiculous. So had Pandit Nehru, who could see nothing beyond

what he described as Hindu communalism and could not talk coherently on any subject for more than a few sentences. Ram Swarup had a way of putting their own words in the mouths of many leaders, which took away the glamour with which they were clad in public eyes and reduced them to their real stature which was puny and piteous most of the time. But I again failed to read the serious message spread all over this dialogue. I could not see the tragedy of the situation in which a whole national leadership had surrendered not only its political will but also its moral judgement to a pack of bullies, rowdies, clowns and lunatics. The tragedy was all the greater because this national leadership also represented a large chunk of the educated Hindus who passed as the intellectual and political elite.

By now I had become emotionally as well as intellectually neutral between Hindus and Muslims. There was perhaps a tilt towards the Muslim point of view. The Communist pamphlets which I had read in support of Pakistan had left me cold for all practical purposes. But the Communist weekly, *New Age*, which I now bought and read regularly, had started exercising its influence. This weekly always presented the Muslims as the exploited peasantry and proletariat, and the Hindus as the exploiting landlords and capitalists. It constantly accused the Congress leadership of striking a compromise, almost a bargain, with the British imperialists for sharing power and pelf rather than make a common cause with the Muslim League leadership and seize power by revolutionary mass action.

My disgust for the Hindus was reinforced by what I heard from my own people amongst whom I lived again, after I had sent my family to the village. These were the same people who had always ridiculed me as an educated nincompoop. They were always denouncing Mahatma Gandhi, many a time in pretty foul language. The Mahatma was moving about in Noakhali where Hindus had been massacred and molested on a large scale by Muslim mobs maddened by Muslim League demagogues. He was doing his best bit to put down the fires of communal frenzy. He certainly did not deserve the denunciations which my people were daily hurling at him. These denunciations became more violent when the Mahatma went on a fast unto death to restrain the Hindus of Bihar, who now became bent upon taking revenge for Noakhali. I also used equally violent language in defence of Mahatma Gandhi. The result was my excommunication from the community to which I belonged. They started calling me "*sooar kā bacchā* (son of a swine) Suhrawardy".

By now I had become some sort of a senior executive in the firm in which I was employed. The salary was small. But I had an exclusive chamber, a telephone, and a peon at my command. I could also sell at my discretion some small quantities of a chemical which was in short supply. A young Marwari broker always pestered me for a drum or two and I always drove him away. Little did I know that this broker was to lead me straight into the lap of the Communist Party in Calcutta.

One day I was reclining in my swivel chair during the lunch break, with my feet on the table and the latest number of the *New Age* spread out before me. Suddenly this broker moved into my chamber. My peon was away and could not stop him. His face became bathed in broad smiles as soon as he saw the paper I was reading. Next he confided: "This is something I never knew about you. You are a progressive. Then you must be knowing many other progressive people in Burra Bazar. Tell me the names of some of them. I know practically all of them." I told him that I knew no progressives except myself. He went away after assuring me that he would see to it that I met quite a few of them, and very soon.

He kept his promise. A few days later he came to me with a pass for a shadow drama, which the Indian People's Theatre Association, a Communist front, was staging in a well-known theatre house of Calcutta. I went and saw it the next day and came away quite impressed. It was a caricature of the Congress leadership which was luring the common people into communal riots so that it could conspire with British Imperialism behind the people's back. It depicted how the streets of Calcutta had been rendered unsafe for both Hindus and Muslims and how the only man who felt safe now was the white man. It appealed to Hindus and Muslims to unite and make the streets of Calcutta unsafe for the white man once again, as had happened during the days of the INA trials in the Red Fort and the RIN revolt in Bombay.

A greater gain from this theatre attendance was my meeting with a number of other Marwari young men to whom my broker friend introduced me after the show. One of them now became my constant companion in the coffee house. He was also a broker, though in the more prestigious share market. But it was his knowledge of Communist leaders of India which really impressed me. He told me many heroic tales about Muzaffar Ahmed, P.C. Joshi, Dange, Adhikari, Ranadive and so on. In my ignorance I took them to be true and was filled with admiration for these great personalities. I did not know at that time that it was mostly Communist mythology meant for the consumption of party comrades.

But I could not help taking as true one tale he told me about a Communist leader from Nagpur. He was imprisoned in the same jail as Acharya Vinoba Bhave, sometime in 1941. Vinobaji used to wash his own clothes every morning while the Communist leader sat nearby smoking a cigarette. His clothes were never clean. One day Vinobaji invited him to join him in washing clothes and observed that it was quite a fun. The Communist leader walked away quietly, came back with a bundle of his soiled clothes, piled them before Vinobaji and said: "Come on, Bhave, have some more fun."

A few days after I met these Marwari Communists my place was visited by a Bengali comrade who was most probably the secretary of some Party unit in Burra Bazar. He cited the name of my Marwari friends as his reference and invited me to visit the Commune in which he lived along with some other party members. I went with him to a nearby place and met a dozen boys and girls who shared a small ill-kept room and a smaller kitchen. I was told that there were three married couples amongst them. This was my first and last visit to a Commune. I did not like the look of it. Nor did I meet the Bengali Communist very frequently. My only gain from this contact was that a hawker started supplying me a free copy of the Communist daily in Bengali, *Swadhinata*, and I was introduced to the Progressive Writers Association, another Communist front organisation.

The president of the Progressive Writers Association in those days was the noted Bengali novelist, Shri Tarashankar Bandopadhyaya. I had read some of his novels and thought very highly of him. I now hoped to meet him in the Association office one of these days. That turned out to be a vain hope because I never met any writer whatsoever in that office during my frequent visits lasting over an year. I did not particularly like the two novels of Tarashankar which the comrades recommended very highly — *Manbantar* and *Hāñsulī Bāñkēr Upakothā*. The great writer was to tell me later on that these were the only two novels he wrote under Communist influence and that both of them had failed. He had to revise *Manbantar* quite a bit before it became acceptable to his normal readers.

A notable event of my association with the Progressive Writers Association was the staging of the Russian film, *Ivan the Terrible*. It had been directed by the famous Eisenstein during the Second World War to whip up Russian nationalism against the Nazi invasion. And it had been hailed as a great achievement of Soviet cinematography. Someone in the Association gave me a book of 25 tickets to sell

amongst those I knew, or could influence to see this masterpiece of progressive art. I succeeded in selling only a few, distributed the rest, and paid some Rs. 64/- from my own pocket. The language of the film was Russian with titles in English. I could not make head or tail of the story. It bored me and I wanted to run out of the crowded hall. But when I compared notes with other comrades in the coffee house, I thought it better to say some words of appreciation. They were full of praise for it while denouncing the decadent Hollywood productions. Eisenstein came under shadow in 1948 and had to make an abject confession of his 'errors'. *Ivan the Terrible* was one of those 'errors'.

I was heading full steam into Communism when I received a severe jolt. It was a novel by Aldous Huxley, *Time Must Have A Stop*, which had just appeared on the stalls. As I saw it, I was reminded of Ram Swarup and could not resist buying it, although its price was the only money I had in my pocket. But it was almost the end of the month and I could look forward to my salary after a few days. I had never read a book by Huxley so far. This one was quite a revelation of his unique genius. I was enraptured by one of its characters, Bruno, contemplating the dark destiny of an erudite scholar with great compassion. But what almost broke my Marxist spell was his demolition of the dogma of inevitable progress which was the bedrock of all Western thought, including Marxism, during the 19th century. He also questioned as a "manipulative fallacy" the repeated reconstruction of social, economic and political institutions to achieve a more equitable order of things. His conclusion was that the roots of social evils lay ultimately in human nature itself. A desirable order could not be built out of the desire-soul of man. Shades of Sri Aurobindo, I thought.

This book shook me very badly and its influence was to surface two years later. Meanwhile, I took to reading Huxley and finished his major novels as well as his two famous books, *Ends and Means* and *Perennial Philosophy*. I was preparing myself to dwell on a different dimension of thought and feeling. I confessed my misgivings to my Communist friend from the share market. He had not read any Huxley. But he knew the party line on this great writer. It was not at all flattering. Next, my friend accused me of being an intellectual. It was his settled opinion, and experience also, that intellectuals did not last in the Party for long. Their great sin was their failure to become partisans on major ideological issues. They suffered from bourgeois objectivity. I felt properly snubbed, even though I knew that my friend had hardly ever read a book in his whole life.

A few days before the riots broke out in August 1946 I had run into an American journalist who was the bureau manager of a prestigious US news agency in Calcutta. He banged the table and made our coffee cups fly when I observed that Truman was a criminal who should be hanged for dropping that atom bomb on Hiroshima. I thought that was the end of our acquaintance. But he rang me up a few days later and explained that he should have tried to understand the Asian point of view on the matter. We met again and again and became friends. He was at that time what the Americans call a liberal and we in India a leftist. It was he who first took me to the Communist Party bookstall in Dacres Lane at Calcutta. He thought that they published some good literature and that their weekly in English was a very well-edited tabloid.

He was also a good friend of Mr. Jeelani, the editor of the Muslim League daily, *Morning News*, who later wrote often in the RSS weekly, *Organiser*. But he had no friend who could explain to him the Hindu point of view. He had toured the whole of Calcutta during the August riots. He thought that the Muslims had suffered far more than the Hindus. Later on, he visited Noakhali. His impression was that the situation was not so bad as the Hindus were painting it. One day he met me soon after he had attended a debate on Noakhali in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. He was very angry with Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookherjee and other Hindu leaders for their making so much of the Hindus in Noakhali being forced to eat beef. "What is so awful about eating beef?", he asked me. I had no opinion on the subject. But I readily joined him in ridiculing "that potbellied demagogue", Dr. Mukherjee. Sometime later this friend moved to Delhi and met Ram Swarup. I promptly received a letter from Ram Swarup saying that I had made quite a Muslim Leaguer out of our American friend. But I did not take the hint.

My personal fortunes changed for the better when I joined as manager of another concern. The salary was much better. But what mattered to me most was that my new boss, a young Marwari of my own age, was a convinced Communist. He was a very well-read man and had a well-stocked personal library from which I could borrow whatever I wanted. He was also a subscriber to many foreign journals which toed the international Communist line. I remember how I gulped down large doses of Communism as I read the American periodicals, *New Masses* and *New Republic*, week after week.

I had given the good news about my new job and my new boss to

my American friend on the eve of his departure from Calcutta. A few days later I received a letter from Ram Swarup which said: "I learn that your boss is a Communist. It is like hearing that a Buddhist made a war. But it seems that the ordinary man is wiser than Marx and Lord Buddha. He will never give to them anything except his subjective loyalty."

But once again I failed to take the hint.

SIX

RAM SWARUP TO THE RESCUE

I was present in the Second Party Conference of the Communist Party of India which was held in the Maidan at Calcutta in February, 1948. It was some time before this Conference that B. T. Ranadive had taken over from P.C. Joshi the General Secretaryship of the CPI. The Ranadive line, as it came to be known in India, was an adoption of the international Communist line laid down by Stalin through the mouth of his minion, Zhdanov, in September 1947.

The Zhdanov line led to widespread purges in East European satellites of the Soviet Union and the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia. The Communist Parties in India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines staged violent uprisings. The civil war in China was intensified and it led to Mao's victory in 1949. The culmination of this line was the invasion of South Korea by North Korea's Communist armies. Stalin was out to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal of British power and the demobilisation of US forces from the Pacific.

The large-sized stage in this Second Party Conference of the CPI was decorated with portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Marshal Tito. Delegates from several East European and South East Asian countries were present. The Yugoslav delegate was particularly paraded on the stage as a famous warrior who was still carrying a German bullet in his shoulder blade. To me his name sounded like 'Jagdish'. Later on I learnt that he was Comrade Dedeir. Speaker after speaker thundered in a very strong language and called upon the people "to give hell to the bourgeois bastards who had sold their souls to the Anglo-American imperialists".

I was really thrilled and made up my mind to join the Party immediately. A few months earlier I had come quite close to another Bengali Communist who was well-placed in the Party hierarchy in Calcutta. He was a friend of my boss and had become my friends also. He had an equally well-stocked library. I now approached him to take me to the Party headquarters and get me enrolled as a party member. He fixed up a date on which I was to accompany him for a rendezvous with revolution. And I started looking forward to that date with an eagerness which I had seldom experienced earlier.

But Providence had planned it otherwise. The Communist Party in Bengal was banned exactly on that date. There was a telephone in the

groundfloor of the house in which I lived. I had given this number to my Bengali friend in case he ever needed to call me in an emergency. He called me that day. It was early in the morning. I did not know that the Party had been banned. He gave me the great news in very grave tones. His advice to me was not to go anywhere near the Party office or the office of any front organisation and to stop professing Communism in public. A few days later it was suggested to me by my Marwari friend from the share market that as my place was not suspected by the police, it could be used for lodging in a Communist leader from Rajasthan who was expected in Calcutta after a fortnight. I immediately extended a warm welcome to the veteran's visit.

But destiny was determined, as it were, to deny me that "honour" also. My friend Ram Swarup suddenly appeared on the scene and expressed his intention to stay with me for quite some time. It was his first visit to Calcutta. I was very happy because he was my nearest and dearest in the whole world. I did not know that Ram Swarup had by now come to regard Communism as a very great evil threatening to engulf the future of mankind. There had been nothing in his letters to indicate this decisive turn. He had only warned me that I was too intelligent to remain a Communist for long. But he had also conceded that I was too intelligent *not* to become a Communist. I had overlooked his warning and taken his concession seriously.

Ram Swarup's conclusions about Communism were revealed to me dramatically a few days after his arrival when there were some fireworks between him and my Marwari friend who had come specifically to meet a person about whom I had always talked so warmly and so highly. I was unhappy to find that there was very little prospect of my two good friends striking a friendship between them. As I saw off my Marwari friend downstairs, he informed me that he would not allow the Communist leader from Rajasthan to stay under a roof which harboured a man of such undesirable political credentials. I was taken aback. I could never think of Ram Swarup as an undesirable person. But I did not know how to counter the argument. Returning to my room upstairs I asked for Ram Swarup's opinion about my Marwari friend. He smiled and said: "Well, he is quite thick-headed. It seems that no argument can penetrate his skull." My friendship with this Marwari friend broke down soon after I renounced Communism and we became total strangers.

Next I tried to find out if Ram Swarup would hit it off with my Bengali friend. I had talked to him also about Ram Swarup and also

given him to read Ram Swarup's *Let Us Have Riots: The Philosophy of Those Who Want to Divide India by Street Riots*. We were entertained in the true tradition of Bengali hospitality at the home of this friend one day. But there was hardly any dialogue between Ram Swarup and our host. Ram Swarup simply listened to my friend expounding the new Party line at length. I was intrigued by Ram Swarup's studied silence. And I asked for his opinion about my friend as soon as we came out of the latter's house. Ram Swarup said "Well, his commitment to Communism is a pathological condition. It needs to be unravelled." This was my second disappointment within a few days of Ram Swarup's arrival in Calcutta.

My Bengali friend was arrested and detained in a camp in North Bengal some weeks later. By the time he came back in 1949 I had not only renounced Communism but had also written against it in some Calcutta newspapers. He came to meet me in our office and said that he had read some funny statements by me. I told him that I was very serious in what I had stated and that perhaps we could meet some day to thrash it out. He showed no eagerness for an argument. That was also the end of another very warm friendship. Our chance meetings in later days have always been a cold and correct affair.

Finally, I arranged a meeting between Ram Swarup and my boss. Both of them exchanged pleasantries and avoided the one subject which I wanted them to discuss. The discussion took place a few days later as my boss was passing by my seat and found Ram Swarup sitting in front of me. It was about the next big world depression and disintegration of the world capitalist system suspected by us Communists to be round the corner at that time. There could be no agreement because Ram Swarup was convinced that another depression would not be permitted by the capitalists who had acquired a fairly good grasp of their economies. My boss gave figures of firms that had gone bankrupt within that year. Ram Swarup requested him to find out for himself and for us also figures of new firms that must have come up during the same specific period. His argument was that in a living economy some firms must be falling sick and going out, and that it did not matter if the reverse trend was also there. It restored a new perspective to the whole argument. My boss offered no more comments that day. I asked Ram Swarup's opinion about my boss. He said: "He is much better. He argues with a lot of facts and figures and not with Party slogans."

A few months passed. Ram Swarup converted me from Communism to anti-Communism during those months. I had to go out of Cal-

cutta on a business trip spread over several weeks. Ram Swarup stayed over in Calcutta but was gone by the time I returned. As I met my boss, his first words were: "Your friend is a wonderful man. We spent a lot of time together. I can now see the worth of what he has to say about Communism." They have been very good friends ever since.

After I had failed to pit my three best Communist friends against Ram Swarup, I had to face him myself and all alone. The discussions spread over several months. Most of the time I repeated Party slogans, sometimes very vehemently. Ram Swarup dismissed them with a smile. One day in my exasperation I struck a superior attitude and said: "We find it difficult to come to any conclusion because I have a philosophical background while you proceed merely from economic, social and political premises." Ram Swarup enquired what I meant by philosophy and I rattled out the list which I had ready in my mind—Locke, Berkley, Hume, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and so on. Ram Swarup told me that at one time or the other he had studied all of them but had found them irrelevant and useless. I was surprised as well as pained. Ram Swarup explained: "Suppose one knows this philosophical system or that. Does it make a better man out of one in any way? These systems are mere cerebrations and have little to offer towards practical purposes of life." The word "cerebration" got stuck in my mind and made it impossible for me to read any abstract philosophy any more. I had been very fond of Western metaphysics and epistemology till that time.

One day Ram Swarup asked me to go to the US Information Library in Esplanade and look up only the documentation in David Dallin's *Slave Labour in Soviet Russia*. I had a great hesitation in going anywhere near this library which I had so long regarded as a seat of blatant imperialist propaganda. It was the same sort of inhibition as I had experienced earlier in reading *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*. But my curiosity had been aroused. I went to this library like a thief and looked up this book. The documentation, mainly photostats of identity cards issued to inmates of forced labour camps located all over the Soviet Union, was extensive as well as very informative. I was shaken. I suddenly remembered that according to the Moscow weekly, *New Times*, Molotov had admitted the existence of "corrective labour camps" in the Soviet Union in a UN debate on the subject of forced labour.

I mentioned my suspicions to my boss. He smiled and asked me to read Victor Kravchenko's *I Chose Freedom* which had appeared some time earlier. I now remembered that my boss had offered to lend me a

copy of this book a few months ago and that I had turned it down with the contemptuous remark that I did not want to waste my time on imperialist propaganda literature. I borrowed the book from him now and read it non-stop. The earlier experience of reading Laski's *Communism* was repeated. Communism now lay in shambles all around me. I could now understand why my boss, an enthusiastic Party-liner earlier, had shown no enthusiasm for the new Party line adopted in February, 1948. His reading of Kravchenko's book had considerably cooled his enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. He admitted as much when I questioned him next day.

Kravchenko, an eminent metallurgical engineer in the Soviet Union, had been sent to Washington during the Second World War to look after military supplies under the Lend Lease Programme. He had defected to the West after some time and written this book as his testament to truth about the Soviet Union. The book became very successful because it was very controversial and saw several editions in quick succession in several languages of the world. I myself was to translate and publish it in Hindi. The Communist press denounced the book as well as its author in a very strong language. At the very time that I first read it, Kravchenko was fighting a prolonged defamation case against a famous French magazine published from Paris. The magazine had described him as a drunkard, a liar, a traitor, and so on. The *Manchester Guardian* was publishing the proceedings of the case in great detail, day after day. An airmail edition of this English daily was regularly received in the British Information Service library at Calcutta.

I followed the Kravchenko case in the *Manchester Guardian* with great interest. Any lurking doubts that might have remained in my mind about the truth of what Kravchenko had stated were removed by this case. The Soviet Embassy in Paris was participating in the defence by the French magazine on the plea that the reputation of their country was involved. The Embassy made many witnesses from the Soviet Union take the stand in the Paris court. Most of the famous Communists as well as fellow-travellers from all over Western Europe were also enlisted against Kravchenko. I was amazed to witness a drama in which while Kravchenko marshalled facts and figures derived mostly from official Soviet publications, in defence of what he had written in his book, a whole battery of Communist bigwigs had nothing better than standard Communist swearology to hurl at him.

One episode was very revealing. It was the Communist contention that Kravchenko was not at all an eminent metallurgical engineer which

he had made himself out to be in his book. Kravchenko produced a copy of *Pravda* in which Molotov had described him by name as one of the most eminent metallurgical engineers being put in charge of the new Soviet metallurgical factory in Vladivostock. Next day Kravchenko's old professor of engineering from Leningrad University appeared in the court and testified that Kravchenko was indeed a brilliant metallurgical engineer and one of his best students. The professor had left Leningrad in the aftermath of the German invasion and was hiding somewhere in Western Europe to avoid repatriation by the Western powers in keeping with a post-war agreement with the Soviet Government.

Another great book which I came across in quick succession was *Stalin's Russia* by the famous French Socialist, Suzanne Labin. She had described in great detail all facets of the Soviet Union and documented her version very meticulously from Soviet sources. It was an hair-raising account. I was now ashamed of myself. Why had I not cared to study the life in the Soviet Union before becoming a rabid Communist? Ram Swarup's cryptic comment was: "Facts about the Soviet Union have always been known, mostly from Soviet sources. There is not much difference about those facts between the Communists and those who are opposed to Communism. What makes the difference is the way you interpret those facts. And your interpretation again is a matter which very much depends upon your sense of values and the culture from which those values are derived."

It was a call for an introspection into, as well as a retrospection of my entire philosophical outlook as it had evolved upto now. I had a second look at Marx who had led me to Communism. I found that Lenin and Stalin were not Marxists at all. They had only used Marxist language to dress up their case, which was quite different. They had reversed Clausewitz's statement that war was politics by other means to read that politics was war by other means. Marx, on the other hand, was a serious sociologist and economist. But, in the last analysis, his system of thought was derived from the same premises as those of Western capitalism. These premises were a materialist world-view, an evolutionistic sociology, a hedonistic psychology, a utilitarian ethics, and a consumerist economy. After all, the Soviet Union aspired to be tomorrow what the United States was today. The goal in both cases was the same—an economy of abundance. The Soviet Union had taken the road of State Capitalism and systematic terror, while the United States had left it to the remorseless operation of market forces. Was I prepared to

accept that goal as the highest human aspiration? If not, what was the goal which could be held out as a better choice?

I had no answer to this question. I was now in the midst of a philosophical void which was to last for several years. The quest which I thought had ended with my acceptance of Communism was on once more.

SEVEN

BACK TO SQUARE ONE

I was back to square one. My faith in Gandhism had lost the battle to Marxism. Now I was no longer a Marxist. I asked myself again and again: Where do I go from here?

The business of life can go on very well without an ideological frame of reference. One eats and mates and sleeps and makes a living. One reads books and papers and gossips and goes about passing conventional judgements on current events. One has a family, a profession, a circle of friends, and some hobby to keep one occupied in leisure time. One grows old, collects one's own share of diseases, and looks back with anguish towards earlier days when one was young and active. For most of us ordinary mortals, this is the whole of human life. We take very seriously our successes and failures and our loves and hates, without spending a thought on what it is all about.

I have always been an ordinary person with ordinary aspirations. Left to myself, I would have led an ordinary life. I was a good business executive by now, having acquired considerable experience in export business. I could have achieved more success along the same line. Maybe I would have been invited by some millionaire in Calcutta to become his junior partner, and earned my own millions in due course. That was one of the fond dreams which my father had dreamt for me. He knew a few people who were poor but talented to start with, and who had succeeded as partners of more successful men. Maybe I would have over-estimated myself in the business world, crashed, and spent the rest of my life cursing those who conspired to bring about my failure in the final bid. I had met quite a few specimens of such failure in Calcutta.

But I had already met a man who will not let me be. That was Ram Swarup. He had tried his best to rescue me from the twin morass of a false self-esteem and a degrading self-pity. He had encouraged and assisted me with timely advice to take an impersonal interest in higher ideas and larger causes. As I shared his ideas and concern for social causes, I could not question his command for action.

Now I was invited by him to join a group to serve the new values we shared with him. The cultural and political atmosphere in India had become, over the years, chock-full with Communist categories of thought. Many myths were afloat about a heaven having descended in

Soviet Russia, Red China and the East European countries occupied by Soviet armed forces and ruled dictatorially by Soviet puppets. The Communist Party of India was using these myths in order to appear as the harbinger of a wholesome social order in India. The Communist categories of thought were helping the Communist Party of India to infiltrate national life in various fields, with the ultimate aim of subverting Indian democracy and reducing the nation to the status of a Soviet satellite.

The main task we took upon ourselves was to expose Communist categories of thought as inimical to human freedom, national cohesion, social health, economic development, and political and cultural pluralism to which we were wedded as a people. Simultaneously, we went out to explode the myths about Communist countries so that our people, particularly our national and democratic political parties, could see them as they were—totalitarian tyrannies with low standards of living and regimented culture. This we did simply by telling the truth about Communist regimes with the help of citations and statistics compiled largely from their own publications.

Our expectation was that the information supplied by us will help the national and democratic parties to see the evil that was Communism, and the conspiracy that was the Communist Party of India. It was for these parties to fight the political battle against the evil creed and the foreign fifth-column. Our work proved useful to a certain extent. Some parliamentarians, trade unionists and political workers in the field used the information supplied by us and put the Communist cohorts on the defensive all along the line. Some journalists and intellectuals welcomed our work and helped us carry on the battle. One of them complimented us by saying that we had placed anti-Communism squarely on the political map of India.

But we discovered in due course that our friends expected from us much more than the limited role we had chalked out for ourselves. The Socialists who were our greatest fellow-fighters against Communism wanted us to fight many more battles on many more fronts. The Congressmen, by and large, had either no opinions at all on any ideological issues or wanted us to fight against Communalism by which they meant the RSS and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), who were always sympathetic, friendly, and helpful to our work, and who wanted us to place India's national interests above everything else. We listened to them patiently, pointed out our limitations, tried to soften animosities amongst political parties wedded to nationalism and democracy, and highlighted the international nature of the Communist conspiracy.

As the battle against Communism progressed, I became acutely aware that a positive frame of reference was badly needed if Communism was to be kept at bay. What could be that frame? Democracy? We had all the democracy we needed. But the Communists alone were making a purposeful use of it towards its ultimate subversion. Socialism? We had already adopted it as a state policy. But the Communists had succeeded in confusing the language of Socialism, so that Socialism got equated with an ever expanding public sector which was inefficient, wasteful and horribly corrupt. Free enterprise? But in the mouths of many it was only a euphemism for Capitalism with a free licence to plunder the public for private profit. Moreover, India in the middle of the 20th century was neither America nor Britain nor Germany nor France nor yet Japan, to try out a nineteenth century experiment. Her problems as well as resources had different dimensions.

I had a strong inclination to settle in favour of nationalism as a strong antidote to Communism. My country, right or wrong — that seemed to be emerging as my main motto. But my bubble was one day pricked by Ram Swarup to whom I listened as he talked to a friend of RSS-BJS persuasion. This friend was laying too much emphasis on eschewing everything that was foreign. Ram Swarup said: "But foreign should not be defined in geographical terms. Then it would have no meaning except territorial or tribal patriotism. To me that alone is foreign which is foreign to truth, foreign to *Ātman*." This touched some chord in my own heart. That was the end of my tether. I did not know which way to turn next.

Ram Swarup was now becoming more and more meditative and reflective in his comments on the current political scene. He often talked of a cultural vacuum which Communism was using to its own great advantage. Communism, he said, was deriving support from a deeper source, a new self-alienation amongst our political and cultural elite, and advancing with the help of forces which on the surface seemed to be allied against Communism. It was not our democratic polity alone which was under attack from Communism. There were several other forces which had come together to suffocate and render sterile the deeper sources of India's inherent strength.

Meanwhile, we became acutely aware of the progressive degeneration of politics in India. Our politics was no longer national politics. It was getting increasingly ridden with many fissiparous factors like caste, language and provincial parochialism. Nation-building was no longer the aim of this politics. Winning elections and grabbing power

and privilege, without a corresponding shouldering of responsibility or accountability to the people, was becoming an end in itself. A politics which was no longer informed by a larger and deeper culture was likely to become pretty poisonous.

A similar degeneration was taking place on the international plane as well. The United States was prepared for a hot war which may not take place. But it was not at all prepared for an ideological contest in which the issues may be decided in the long run. The Soviet Union was supplying a lot of ideas, ideology and categories of thought in a stream of books, pamphlets and periodicals. The only response which the United States could muster against this menace was economic aid. It was widely believed amongst U.S. thinkers and rulers that a man was likely to become better wedded to freedom and democracy if his standard of living was raised. Ram Swarup remarked one day: "The Soviet Union swears by Dialectical Materialism. But what it practises is Idealism. On the other hand, the United States swears by Idealism. But what it practises is Dialectical Materialism. There is a neat division of roles between the two powers. The Soviets take care of our heads. The United States takes care of our hearths and homes."

In this atmosphere of declining political standards, we decided to withdraw our anti-communist campaign as we have conceived it to start with. We were convinced that a larger battle, couched along deeper cultural contours, was needed if the nation was to be saved from the corrosion of its soul.

It was at this time that I fell seriously ill and lost a lot of weight which I had never had in plenty. A Catholic missionary whom I had known earlier in connection with our anti-communist work came to visit me. He was a good and kindly man and had a strong character. He had insisted upon his religious right to sell our anti-Communist literature in *melās* and exhibitions in spite of his mission's advice that this was no part of his ordained work and that, in any case, the Government of India frowned upon it.

The Father, as I called him, found me in a difficult condition, physically as well as financially. He felt sure that it was in such times that Jesus Christ came to people. He asked me if I was prepared to receive Jesus. I did not understand immediately that he was inviting me to get converted to Catholicism. My impression was that he wanted to help me with some spiritual exercises prescribed by Christianity. Moreover, I had always admired Jesus. I had, therefore, no objection to receiving him. Only I was doubtful if someone was really in a position to

arrange the meeting. But I became aware of the Father's true intentions as I travelled with him to a distant monastery. He asked every other missionary he met on the way to pray for his success.

At this monastery, which was a vast place with very picturesque surroundings, I was advised by the Father to go into a retreat. It meant my solitary confinement to a room. I was not supposed to look at or talk to anyone on my way to the bathroom or while taking my morning and evening strolls on the extensive lawns outside. And I was to meditate on themes which the Father prescribed for me in the course of four or five lectures he delivered to me during the course of the day, starting at about 6.30 in those winter mornings. I was not used to this way of life. I had never lived in such solitude by my own choice. My only solace was that I was allowed to smoke and provided with plenty of books on the Christian creed and theology.

I tried to read some of the books. But I failed to finish any one of them. They were full of Biblical themes and theological terminology with which I was not familiar. Most of the time they made me recall Ram Swarup's observation about mere cerebration. Or they were simplistic harangues to love Christ and join the Catholic Church. They had a close similarity to Communist pamphlets which I had read in plenty. The Father had asked me again and again to invoke Christ and meditate upon him. But he had not told me how to do it. I had no previous practice in meditation. I did not know how to invoke Christ, or any other godhead for that matter. All I could do was to think again and again of Christ preaching the Sermon on the Mount or saving an adulteress from being stoned to death. But my thoughts would wander away after every few moments.

The Father asked me before the start of every new lesson if I was feeling drawn towards Christ. In my exasperation I told him on the evening of the second day that the only deity towards whom I was feeling drawn was Sri Krishna. This was not true. I had told a lie for which I felt ashamed immediately after. I had felt drawn towards nothing, far less Sri Krishna. Most of the time my mind was busy in free association in the Freudian sense. I told the lie because by now I was fed up with the Father's lectures. They had no relevance to any of the problems with which I was faced. I wanted the Father to frown at the mention of Sri Krishna and say something unkind about him so that I could pick up an argument, defy the discipline he had imposed on me, and get out of his clutches.

But the Father did not frown. Nor did he say anything unkind

about Sri Krishna. He became thoughtful, almost pensive. He told me at last that in his long experience of conversions, Jesus had never tarried so long. He asked me to make another attempt that night. I promised. But I went to sleep immediately after he left. I was dead tired. Little did I know that my release from that prison was to come about next morning. While delivering a lecture on Creation, the Father said that God in his wisdom and kindness had made all these fishes and animals and birds for man's consumption. I immediately rose in revolt. I told him very emphatically that I was a *vaishṇava* and a vegetarian and that I had absolutely no use for a God that bestowed upon man the right to kill and eat his other creatures simply because man happened to be stronger and more skilled. I added that in my opinion it was the duty of the strong and the more skilled to protect the weaker and the less wily.

The Father also suddenly lost his self-possession. He almost shouted: "I can never understand you Hindus who go about seeing a soul in every lice and bug and cockroach that crawls around you. The Bible says in so many words that man is God's highest creation. What is wrong with the higher lording over the lower?"

I kept quiet. I could see the pain in his eyes. I did not want to add to his anguish. He recovered his self-possession very soon and smiled. Now I went down on my knees before him and asked his forgiveness for my lack of strength to go on with the retreat. He agreed, although rather reluctantly. His sense of failure was writ large on his face. I was very sorry indeed. I now wished that it would have been better for both of us if Christ had come to me.

On our way back to the big city where his mission was housed he became his old normal self again. There was not a trace of bitterness on his face or in his voice as we talked and joked and discussed several serious and not so serious matters. Now I took my courage in both my hands and asked him my final question: "Father, am I not already a Christian? I do not normally tell a lie. I do not steal. I do not bear false witness. I do not covet my neighbour's wife or property. What more can a man do to demand God's grace and kinship with Christ? Why should you insist on a formal conversion which in no way helps me to become better than what I am?" His reply was very positive and it estranged me from the Christian creed for good. He said: "It is an illusion that you can become a Christian if you practice Christian virtues. One cannot claim to be virtuous unless one is baptised in the Church of Christ. He is the only saviour. No one outside his fold can claim salvation. The only thing the heathens can look forward to is eternal hell-fire."

That evening I had a chat with the librarian in the mission library. He was young but looked very sad and far away. His surname was Hindu. But he told me that he had become a Christian a few years ago. He continued: "I fell seriously ill. There was no money in the house. I was earning a small salary and had a wife and two children to support. My relatives were also poor like me and could not help much, what with the cost of medicines and a prescribed diet. It was at this moment that the Father appeared on the scene. I had known him earlier as he frequented our street in search of converts. He brought all the medicines and fruits for me. I was very grateful to him. And one day in a moment of my mental weakness he baptised me. My wife refused to become a Christian. She was an orthodox Hindu. But she did not desert me. After I had regained my health, the Father insisted that my conversion was not complete unless I ate beef. As a Kayastha I was already a non-vegetarian. I saw no great harm in eating yet another type of meat. But as soon as my wife learnt of it, she left with our two children and went away to her father's place in another town. I went after her. But I was turned out of their house. I have been excommunicated. No one in my community or amongst my relatives will share with me so much as a glass of water. I have nowhere to go. This mission is my only refuge till I die."

I was reminded of Vivekananda's description of Christianity as Churchianity. At the same time I was ashamed of the society to which I belonged. For ages past, this society had perfected the art of losing its limbs, one after another. But what could I do for that young man? I was myself in search of a refuge, in the physical as well as the ideological sense.

EIGHT

RETURN TO MY SPIRITUAL HOME

I had to leave Calcutta for good and return to Delhi on account of my health. I had spent twelve long years in that great and stormy centre of Bengali culture and politics. I had participated in Calcutta's politics in a way. It was my misfortune that I did not drink equally deep at the fount of Bengali culture which had, in the recent past, become synonymous with India's reawakening to her innermost soul. Bengal herself was turning away from that great heritage and towards an imported ideology which was leading her towards spiritual desolation.

But I did make a lasting contact with Bengali literature which I consider to be one of the greatest literatures of the world, leave alone India. I thought that while Gurudeva Rabindranath was the greatest poet of modern times, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyaya could rub shoulders with any great novelist the world had known. And I was greatly drawn towards Vaishnava and Baul poets whose *padāvali kīrtana* (songs centred round Sri Krishna) and mystic muse were still a living tradition in Bengal. I had the privilege to attend some sessions of these singers of the soul's striving towards divinity.

My new job in Delhi gave me a lot of leisure. I could read and think and take stock of my situation as I took long walks along the lonely avenues of New Delhi. But what mattered most was that I could now spend all my evenings with Ram Swarup. I could see that his seeking had taken a decisive turn towards a deeper direction. He was as awake to the social, political and cultural scene in India as ever before. But this vigil had now acquired an entirely new dimension. Political, social and cultural movements were no more clashes or congregations of external forces and intellectual ideas; they had become projections of psychic situations in which the members of a society chose to stay. His judgements had now acquired a depth which I frequently found it difficult to fathom.

Ram Swarup was now spending long hours sitting in meditation. His talks now centred round the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Gītā*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the Buddha. He invited me to sit in meditation with him sometimes. I tried off and on. But I was too restless to sit in a single pose for long, close my eyes to the outer world, and peep into the void in search of some new perceptions. I had a strong urge to write and pour myself out in strong comments on the current political situation. But who was there to publish what I wrote?

It was at this time that Shri K.R. Malkani, the soft-spoken and ever-smiling editor of the *Organiser*, extended the hospitality of his weekly to me. I wrote more or less regularly in the *Organiser* for several years. One of my long series was devoted to a political biography of Pandit Nehru which ultimately cost me my job. Some friends frowned upon my writing for the *Organiser*. My invariable reply was that one paid court at the portals of the so-called prestigious papers only *if one had nothing to say* and if one's only aspiration was for a fat cheque. I found Shri Malkani a very conscientious editor. He never crossed a 't' or dotted an 'i' of whatever I wrote, without consulting me.

Another great man I met in Delhi at this time was Shri Gurudatta, the noted Hindi novelist and exponent of Hindu culture. It was rather timidly and in a casual tone that I mentioned to him a novel which I had finished. His response was instantaneous and very warm-hearted. He invited me to write whatever I felt like and assured me that he would see to it that it was published. He kept his promise, even though I eventually involved his publisher in some losses. But what fascinated me was the tender human being hiding behind that tough exterior. He was my senior by more than twenty years. He had been a vigilant witness to a long cultural and political history since the twenties of this century. He had also developed a systematic critique of events and personalities in his own ideological perspective. But I never saw him impose the weight of his years or his wisdom on others. I always found him ready to change his own judgement if he felt convinced by an opposite statement of facts or logic. His capacity to become young with the younger generation was simply marvellous.

I was using my spare time during these 3-4 years to brush up my Sanskrit. I made quite a headway because I relinquished the aid of Hindi or English translations and broke through some very tough texts with the help of Sanskrit commentaries alone. At last I was able to read the *Mahābhārata* in its original language, the *Gīrvāṇa Bhārati*. The 4-volume text published by the Gita Press came in quite handy. It was an experience unparalleled in the whole of my studies so far.

In the long evenings I spent with Ram Swarup I compared with him my notes on the *Mahābhārata*. But Ram Swarup's way of looking at the *Mahābhārata* was quite different. He related it directly to the *Vedas*. He expounded how the mighty characters of this great epic embodied and made living the spiritual vision of the Vedic seers. What fascinated me still more was Ram Swarup's exposition of *Dharma* as

enunciated in the *Mahābhārata*. To me, *Dharma* had always been a matter of moral norms, external rules and regulations, do's and don'ts, enforced on life by an act of will. Now I was made to see *Dharma* as a multi-dimensional movement of man's inner law of being, his psychic evolution, his spiritual growth, and his spontaneous building of an outer life for himself and the community in which he lived.

The next thing I did was to read and re-read the major works of Sri Aurobindo and discuss his message with Ram Swarup, day after day. Sri Aurobindo would have remained an abstract philosopher for me in spite of all his writings on Yoga, had not Ram Swarup explained to me how this seer was the greatest exponent of the Vedic vision in our times. Sri Aurobindo's message, he told me, was in essence the same old Vedic message, namely, that we are Gods in our innermost being and should live the life of Gods on this earth. He made me see what Sri Aurobindo meant by the physical, the vital, the mental, and the psychic. He related these terms to the theory of the five *kośas* in the *Upanishads*.

But Sri Aurobindo was not an exponent of Vedic spirituality alone. He was also a poet, a connoisseur, a statesman, and a superb sociologist. His *Human Cycle* was an interpretation of history which placed man's striving for spiritual perfection in his inner as well as outer life as the prime mover of the world matrix. His *Foundations of Indian Culture* made me see for the first time that our multifaceted heritage of great spirituality, art, architecture, literature, social principles, and political forms sprang from and revolved round a single centre. That centre was Sanātana Dharma which was the very soul of India. Sri Aurobindo had made it very clear in his *Uttarpara Speech* that India rose with the rise of Sanātana Dharma and would die if Sanātana Dharma was allowed to die.

Another great writer who led me on at this stage was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. I had read all his novels but had never been able to understand why he had been honoured as a *rishi*. I myself was a novelist and had already written several humane stories. I thought that a novelist dealt with the dimensions of human character and mapped the heights it could scale and the depths to which it could sink. Why should we foist the title of a *rishi* on this poor fellow? That way *rishis* will be available a dime a dozen. My doubts about Bankim Chandra being a *rishi* were removed when I read the second volume of his *Collected Works* in Bengali. His insights into the innermost core of Hindu culture were a revelation. His *Rāmāyaṇer Ālochonā* made me see the mon-

strosities of modern Indology, more than ever before. I immediately translated this masterpiece into Hindi.

In my earlier days I had read the biography of Sri Ramakrishna written by Romain Rolland. I had read the talk which Vivekananda had delivered long ago about "My Master". I had visited Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar. I had also seen a Bengali film on his life. But what brought me into an intimate and living contact with this great mystic and *bhakta* and *shākta* and *advaitin*, was his *Kathāmrita*. He had not used a single abstraction nor discussed any of the problems which pass as philosophy. His talks embodied expressions of a concrete consciousness which had dropped every trace of the dirt and dross and inertia which characterise what is known as normal human consciousness. The metaphors which sprang spontaneously from this purified consciousness were matchless in their aptness and illumined in a few words the knotted problems which many voluminous works had failed to solve. I was now having my first intimations of immortality towards which Kabir and Nanak and Sri Garibdas had inclined me earlier.

The final breakthrough came with the publication of Ram Swarup's long article, *Buddhism vis-a-vis Hinduism*, in the *Organiser* sometime in 1959. The Buddha's parable of the man struck by an arrow and refusing medical aid until a number of his intellectual questions and curiosities were satisfied, struck me in my solar plexus as it were. I had spent a lifetime revelling in intellectual exercises. What was the nature of the Universe? What was man's place in it? Was there a God? Had he created this Cosmos? Why had he made such a mess of it? What was the goal of human life? Was man free to pursue that goal? Or was he predetermined or predestined or fated for a particular goal by forces beyond his control? And so on and so forth, it was an endless cerebration. The Buddha had described it as *Drishti-kāntāra*, the desert of seeking. Sri Ramakrishna had also ridiculed the salt doll of an intellect which had gone out to fathom the great ocean but got dissolved at the very first dip.

I was now sure that the quality of questions I raised was controlled by the quality of my consciousness. Ram Swarup told me that what we called the normal human consciousness had to be made passive before one could establish contact with another consciousness which held the key to the proper questions and the proper answers. Wrestling with and stirring up the normal consciousness with all sorts of questions and curiosities was the surest way to block the way of a purer and higher consciousness which was always waiting on the threshold.

I now requested Ram Swarup to initiate me into the art of meditation. He told me that no very elaborate art was involved. I could sit and meditate with him, whenever I liked, wait and watch, go within myself as far as I could manage at any time, dwell on whatever good thoughts got revealed, and the rest would follow. I acted upon his simple instructions with some measure of scepticism in my mind. But in the next few days I could see some results which encouraged me for a further endeavour.

One day I meditated on *Ahimsā* which had remained an abstract concept for me so far. After a while I found myself begging forgiveness from all those whom I had hurt by word or deed, or towards whom I had harboured any ill-will. It was not an exercise in generalities. Person after person rose in my memory, going back into the distant past, and I bowed in repentance before each one of them. Finally, I begged forgiveness from Stalin against whom I had written so much and upon whom I had hurled so many brickbats. The bitterness which had poisoned my life over the long years was swept off my mind in a sudden relaxation of nerves. I felt as if a thousand thorns which tormented my flesh had been taken out by a master physician without causing the slightest pain. I was in need of no greater assurance that this was the way on which I should walk.

One day, I told Ram Swarup how I, had never been able to accept the Devi either as Saraswati or as Lakshmi or as Durga or as Kali. He smiled and asked me to meditate on the Devi that day. I tried my best in my own way. Nothing happened for some time. Nothing came my way. My mind was a big blank. But in the next moment the void was filled with a sense of some great presence. I did not see any concrete image. No words were whispered in my ears. Yet the rigidity of a lifetime broke down and disappeared. The Great Mother was beckoning her lost child to go and sit in her lap and feel safe from all fears. We had a gramophone record of Dr. Govind Gopal Mukhopadhyaya's sonorous *stuti* to the Devi. As I played it, I prayed to Her.

There were many more meditations. My progress was not fast; nor did I go far. But I now felt sure that this was the method by which I could rediscover for myself the great truths of which the ancients had spoken in Hindu scriptures. It was not the end of my seeking, which had only started in right earnest. But it was surely the end of my wandering in search of a shore where I could safely anchor my soul, and take stock of my situation.

Ram Swarup warned me very strongly against letting my reflective

reason go to sleep under the soporific of inner experience, however deep or steep. This was the trap, he said, into which many a practitioner had fallen and felt sure that they had found the final truth, even when they were far away from the goal.

The tragedy of Semitic prophets, particularly Moses and Muhammad, was still greater. They had no inkling of the yogic method of deepening, enlarging, and purging the human consciousness of its inherent impurities. They passed under the spell of some external though passionate idea, internalised it by a constant and fanatic preoccupation with it, confused the voice of this idea with the voice of God, and ended by claiming a monopoly of truth for themselves and a monopoly of virtue for their followers. Jesus Christ was not a Semitic prophet in this sense. He was a mystic and a spiritual seeker. But his universal message was soon eclipsed by the exclusive theology of Paul and other founding fathers of the Christian Church. They were also seized by an external though passionate idea.*

The soul's hunger for absolute Truth, absolute Goodness, absolute Beauty and absolute Power, I was told, was like the body's hunger for wholesome food and drink. And that which satisfied this hunger of the human soul, fully and finally, was Sanātana Dharma, true for all times and climes. A votary of Sanātana Dharma did not need an arbitrary exercise of will to put blind faith in a supernatural revelation laid down in a single scripture. He did not need the intermediacy of an historical prophet nor the help of an organised church to attain salvation. Sanātana Dharma called upon its votary to explore his own self in the first instance and see for himself the truths expounded in sacred scriptures. Prophets and churches and scriptures could be aids but never the substitutes for self-exploration, self-purification, and self-transcendence.

I had come back at last, come back to my spiritual home from which I had wandered away in self-forgetfulness. But this coming back was no atavistic act. On the contrary, it was a reawakening to my ancestral heritage which was waiting all along for me to lay my claim on its largesses. It was also the heritage of all mankind as proved by the seers, sages and mystics of many a time and clime. It spoke in different languages to different people. To me it spoke in the language of Hindu spirituality and Hindu culture at their highest. I could not resist its call. *I became a Hindu.*

* Since I wrote these lines, I have revised my view of Jesus. Extensive readings regarding him have convinced me that he too was a typical Semitic prophet, and that Christianity is his legacy rather than that of Paul.

POSTSCRIPT

NIGHTMARE OF NEHRUISM

I am adding this postscript to the third reprint of what may be described as my intellectual autobiography in order to complete my story as a convinced and conscious Hindu. The story relates mainly to my encounter with Nehruism in its various expressions.

Today, I view Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as a bloated Brown Sahib, and Nehruism as the combined embodiment of all the imperialist ideologies — Islam, Christianity, White Man's Burden, and Communism — that have flooded this country in the wake of foreign invasions. And I do not have the least doubt in my mind that if India is to live, Nehruism must die. Of course, it is already dying under the weight of its sins against the Indian people, their country, their society, their economy, their environment, and their culture. What I plead is that a conscious rejection of Nehruism in all its forms will hasten its demise, and save us from the mischief which it is bound to create further if it is allowed to linger.

I have reached this conclusion after a study of Pandit Nehru's writings, speeches and policies ever since he started looming large on the Indian political scene. But lest my judgement sounds arbitrary, I am making clear the premises from which I proceed. These premises themselves have been worked out by me through prolonged reflection on the society and culture to which I belong.

I have already described how I returned to an abiding faith in Sanātana Dharma under the guidance of Ram Swarup. The next proposition which became increasingly clear to me in discussions with him, was that Hindu society which has been the vehicle of Sanātana Dharma is a great society and deserves all honour and devotion from its sons and daughters. Finally, Bhāratavarsha became a holy land for me because it has been and remains the homeland of Hindu society.

There are Hindus who start the other way round, that is, with Bhāratavarsha being a holy land (*puṇyabhūmi*) simply because it happens to be their fatherland (*pitribhūmi*) as well as the field of their activity (*karmabhūmi*). They honour Hindu society because their forefathers belonged to it, and fought the foreign invaders as Hindus. Small wonder that their notion of nationalism is purely territorial, and their notion of Hindu society no more than tribal. For me, however, the starting point is Sanātana Dharma. Without Sanātana Dharma,

Bhāratavarsha for me is just another piece of land, and Hindu society just another assembly of human beings. So my commitment is to Sanātana Dharma, Hindu society, and Bhāratavarsha — in that order.

In this perspective, my first premise is that Sanātana Dharma which is known as Hinduism at present, is not only a religion but also a whole civilization which has flourished in this country for ages untold, and which is struggling to come into its own again after a prolonged encounter with several sorts of predatory imperialism. On the other hand, I do not regard Islam and Christianity as religions at all. They are, for me, ideologies of imperialism like Nazism and Communism, legitimizing aggression by one set of people against another in the name of a god which gangsters masquerading as prophets have invented after their own image. I see no place for them in India, now that India has defeated and dispersed Islamic and Christian regimes. I do not concede to Islam and Christianity the right to maintain their missions in this country, or, for that matter, their seminaries which train missionaries for waging war on the Hindus. I have no use for a Secularism which treats Hinduism as just another religion, and puts it on par with Islam and Christianity. For me, this concept of Secularism is a gross perversion of the concept which arose in the modern West as a revolt against Christianity and which should mean, in the Indian context, a revolt against Islam as well. The other concept of Secularism, namely, *sarva-dharma-samabhāva* was formulated by Mahatma Gandhi in order to cure Islam and Christianity of their aggressive self-righteousness, and stop them from effecting conversions from the Hindu fold. This second concept was abandoned when the Constitution of India conceded to Islam and Christianity the right to convert as a fundamental right. Those who invoke this concept in order to browbeat the Hindus are either ignorant of the Mahatma's intention, or are deliberately distorting his message.

My second premise is that Hindus in their ancestral homeland are not a mere community. For me, the Hindus constitute the nation, and are the only people who are interested in the unity, integrity, peace and prosperity of this country. On the other hand, I do not regard the Muslims and the Christians as separate communities. For me, they are our own people who have been alienated by Islamic and Christian imperialism from their ancestral society and culture, and who are being used by imperialist forces abroad as their colonies for creating mischief and strife in the Hindu homeland. I, therefore, do not subscribe to the thesis that Indian nationalism is something apart from and above Hindu

nationalism. For me, Hindu nationalism is the same as Indian nationalism. I have no use for the slogans of "composite culture", "composite nationalism" and "composite state". And I have not the slightest doubt in my mind that all those who mouth these slogans as well as the slogan of "Hindu communalism", are, wittingly or unwittingly, being traitors to the cause of Indian nationalism, no matter what ideological attires they put on and what positions they occupy in the present set-up.

My third premise is that Bhāratavarsha has been and remains the Hindu homeland par excellence. I repudiate the description of Bhāratavarsha as the Indian or Indo-Pak Subcontinent. I refuse to concede that Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have ceased to be integral parts of the Hindu homeland simply because they have passed under the heel of Islamic imperialism. Hindus have never laid claim to any land outside the natural and well-defined borders of their ancient homeland, either by right of conquest or by invoking a promise made in some scripture. I, therefore, see no reason why Hindus should surrender their claim to what they have legitimately inherited from their forefathers but what has been taken away from them by means of armed force. Moreover, unless the Hindus liberate those parts of their homeland from the stranglehold of Islam, they will continue to face the threat of aggression against the part that remains in their possession at present. These so-called Islamic countries have been used in the past, and are being used at present as launching pads for the conquest of India that has survived.

My fourth premise is that the history of Bhāratavarsha is the history of Hindu society and culture. It is the history of how the Hindus created a civilization which remained the dominant civilization of the world for several millennia, how they became complacent due to excess of power and prosperity and neglected the defences of their homeland, how they threw back or absorbed in the vast complex of their society and culture a series of early invaders, and how they fought the onslaughts of Islamic, Christian, and British imperialism for several centuries and survived. I do not recognize the Muslim rule in medieval India as an indigenous dispensation. For me, it was as much of a foreign rule as the latter-day British rule. The history of foreign invaders forms no part of the history of India, and remains a part of the history of those countries from which the invaders came, or of those cults to which they subscribed. And I do not accept the theory of an Aryan invasion of India in the second millennium BC. This theory was originally proposed by scholars as a tentative hypothesis for explaining the fact that the lan-

guages spoken by the Indians, the Iranians, and the Europeans belong to the same family. And a tentative hypothesis it has remained till today so far as the world of scholarship is concerned. It is only the anti-national and separatist forces in India which are presenting this hypothesis as a proved fact in order to browbeat the Hindus, and fortify their divisive designs. I have studied the subject in some depth, and find that the linguistic fact can be explained far more satisfactorily if the direction of Aryan migration is reversed.

These are my principal premises for passing judgement on Pandit Nehru and Nehruism. Many minor premises can be deduced from them for a detailed evaluation of India's spiritual traditions, society, culture, history, and contemporary politics.

It may be remembered that Pandit Nehru was by no means a unique character. Nor is Nehruism a unique phenomenon for that matter. Such weak-minded persons and such subservient thought-processes have been seen in all societies that have suffered the misfortune of being conquered and subjected to alien rule for some time. There are always people in all societies who confuse superiority of armed might with superiority of culture, who start despising themselves as belonging to an inferior breed and end by taking to the ways of the conqueror in order to regain self-confidence, who begin finding faults with everything they have inherited from their forefathers, and who finally join hands with every force and factor which is out to subvert their ancestral society. Viewed in this perspective, Pandit Nehru was no more than a self-alienated Hindu, and Nehruism is not much more than Hindu-baiting born out of and sustained by a deep-seated sense of inferiority vis-a-vis Islam, Christianity, and the modern West.

Muslim rule in medieval India had produced a whole class of such self-alienated Hindus. They had interpreted the superiority of Muslim arms as symbolic of the superiority of Muslim culture. Over a period of time, they had come to think and behave like the conquerors and to look down upon their own people. They were most happy when employed in some Muslim establishment so that they might pass as members of the ruling elite. The only thing that could be said in their favour was that, for one reason or the other, they did not convert to Islam and merge themselves completely in Muslim society. But for the same reason, they had become trojan horses of Islamic imperialism, and worked for pulling down the cultural defences of their own people.

The same class walked over to the British side when British arms became triumphant. They retained most of those anti-Hindu prejudices

which they had borrowed from their Muslim masters, and cultivated some more which were contributed by the British establishment and the Christian missions. That is how the British rule became a divine dispensation for them. The most typical product of this double process was Raja Ram Mohun Roy.

Fortunately for Hindu society, however, the self-alienated Hindu had not become a dominant factor during the Muslim rule. His class was confined to the urban centres where alone Muslim influence was present in a significant measure. The number of this bastard breed was few and far between in the countryside where Muslim rule had never struck strong roots. Secondly, the capacity of Islam for manipulating human minds by means of ideological warfare was less than poor. It worked mostly by means of brute force, and aroused strong resistance. Finally, throughout the period of Muslim rule, the education of Hindu children had remained in Hindu hands by and large. So the self-alienated Hindu existed and functioned only on the margins of Hindu society, and seldom in the mainstream.

All this changed with the coming of the British conquerors and the Christian missionaries. Their influence was not confined to the urban centres because their outposts had spread to the countryside as well. Secondly, they were equipped with a stock of ideas and the means for communicating them which were far more competent as compared to the corresponding equipment of Islam. And what made the big difference in the long run was that the education of Hindu children was taken over by the imperialist and the missionary establishments. As a cumulative result, the crop of self-alienated Hindus multiplied fast and several fold. Add to that the blitzkrieg against authentic Hindus and in favour of the self-alienated Hindus mounted by the Communist apparatus built up by Soviet imperialism. It is no less than a wonder in human history that Hindu society and culture not only survived the storm, but also produced a counter-attack under Maharshi Dayananda, Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi such as earned for them the esteem of the world at large. Even so, the self-alienated Hindus continued to multiply and flourish in a cultural milieu mostly dominated by the modern West. And they came to the top in the post-independence period when no stalwart of the Hindu resurgence remained on the scene.

The power and prestige which Pandit Nehru acquired within a few years after the death of Sardar Patel had nothing to do with his own merits, either as a person, or as a political leader, or as a thinker. They were the outcome of a long historical process which had brought to the

fore a whole class of self-alienated Hindus. Pandit Nehru would have never come to the top if this class had not been there. And this class would not have become dominant or remained so, had it not been sustained by establishments in the West, particularly that in the Soviet Union.

It is not an accident that the Nehruvian regime has behaved like the British Raj in most respects. The Nehruvians have looked at India not as a Hindu country but as a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural cockpit. They have tried their best, like the British, to suppress the mainstream society and culture with the help of "minorities", that is, the colonies crystallized by imperialism. They have also tried to fragment Hindu society, and create more "minorities" in the process. In fact, it has been their whole-time occupation to eliminate every expression of Hindu culture, to subvert every symbol of Hindu pride, and persecute every Hindu organization, in the name of protecting the "minorities". Hindus have been presented as monsters who will commit cultural genocide if allowed to come to power.

The partition of the country was brought about by Islamic imperialism. But the Nehruvians blamed it shamelessly on what they stigmatized as Hindu communalism. A war on the newly born republic of India was waged by the Communists in the interests of Soviet imperialism. But the Nehruvians were busy apologizing for these traitors, and running hammer and tongs after the RSS. There are many more parallels between the British Raj on the one hand and the Nehruvian regime on the other. I am not going into details because I am sure that the parallels will become obvious to anyone who applies his mind to the subject. The Nehruvian formula is that Hindus should stand accused in every situation, no matter who is the real culprit.

II

It was my great good fortune that Pandit Nehru never became my hero. Heroes have a way of inhibiting cold reasoning and calm reflection among those who admire them. My reason and reflection have suffered an eclipse, every now and then. But not for long. And not for a moment under the spell of Pandit Nehru.

During my school days in my village and, later on, in Delhi, the Freedom Movement for me meant Mahatma Gandhi. I did not hear many stories about him except that he lived on goat's milk, plied the *charkhā*, and had tamed the wild Pathans. The only other leader of whom I became increasingly aware was Pandit Nehru. There was quite

a folklore afloat about him. He was reputed to be the only son of a fabulously rich man who lived in a palace at Allahabad, who got his clothes stitched in London and laundered in Paris, who had used high-denomination currency notes as fuel for preparing tea when the viceroy paid him a visit, and who had blisters all over his tender skin when he put on *khādi* clothes for the first time. The son was known to have received his school and college education in England, spurned the friendship of the Prince of Wales who was his classmate, turned down with contempt many honours which the British were only too keen to bestow upon him in order to win him over to their side, and chosen to be the *betāj bādshāh* (uncrowned king) of his own people.

I, therefore, felt excited when wall-posters went up all over Delhi, announcing that the great man was going to address a public meeting in the Gandhi Grounds adjacent to the Chandni Chowk. I do not remember the exact date. It was most probably in late 1934 or early 1935. I was a student of the seventh standard.

Gandhi Grounds was at a stone's throw from the place where I lived. Even so, I went to the venue of the meeting quite early in order to sit near the rostrum, and see the speaker from close quarters. The rostrum was quite high. But the crowd that collected by the time Pandit Nehru arrived was not big by latter-day standards.

There was a thunderous applause as Pandit Nehru came up on the rostrum, greeted the people with folded hands, and was formally introduced by a local Congress leader. But the next thing I saw made me rub my eyes. The great man had become red in the face, turned to his left, and planted a slap smack on the face of the same leader who was standing near the mike. The mike had failed. Pandit Nehru was gesticulating and shouting at the top of his voice as if something terrible had happened. Meanwhile the mike had started functioning again so that he could be heard all over the place. He was saying: "*Dilli ki Congress kē kārkun kaminē haiñ, razil haiñ, namāqul haiñ. Mainē kyatti bār insē kahā hai ke intizām nahin kar saktē tō mujhē mat bulayā karō, par yē suntē hi nahin* (the leaders of the Congress in Delhi are lowbred, mean, and mindless people. I have told them time and again not to invite me if they cannot make proper arrangements. But they pay no heed)." There was pin-drop silence for a moment. The next moment there was another thunderous applause. The Gandhi-capped man sitting next to me offered comment: "Panditji is famous for his temper. And people like him all the more that way." I turned towards the rostrum. The face of the Congress leader who had been slapped was bathed in smiles as if he had won some coveted prize.

This was a new experience for me. I had attended many public meetings in my village, at my district headquarters, and in Delhi. I had never witnessed such wild behaviour on a public platform. Of course, those other speakers were not so big as this one. Was it the way the big ones behaved? I wondered. I found it difficult to admire a man who had not only shouted at but also slapped someone who was placed lower than him in life, and who was in no position to hit back. And that too for no fault of the victim. Even as a young boy, I had nothing but contempt for bullies.

The speech which followed was far more disappointing. I do not remember the subject. It must have been about the current political scene. I understood no politics at that time beyond the call that the British must go. All I can recall now is the language which Pandit Nehru was speaking. It was neither Hindi, nor Urdu. Most of his sentences were far from being straight in terms of grammar or syntax. Occasionally, he was fumbling for words. I thought he was a very poor speaker. I had heard many others who, though not so well-known, were far better and more coherent. I would not have noticed his language if I had not known that he belonged to a province which was famous for both Hindi and Urdu in proper form.

There were several other public meetings in Delhi addressed by Pandit Nehru after this first one which I had attended. But I did not care for them. His next performance I saw was in 1942. Talks with the Cripps Mission had failed a few days earlier. I wanted to know what the Congress intended to do next vis-a-vis the war which Hitler was waging against the Soviet Union. I was a post-graduate student by now, full of sympathy for the cause which my professor of political science had presented as that of human freedom and progress. I was convinced that Hitler was a wild beast who had to be hunted down at any cost.

The venue of the meeting was the same old Gandhi Grounds. But the crowd was much bigger than I had ever seen in a public meeting. I took my stand near the gate which opens towards the Fountain. I did not want to be caught in the melee at the end of the meeting. Little did I know that I was going to witness a scene which would turn me away from Pandit Nehru for all time to come.

The great man was profusely garlanded as soon as he appeared on the rostrum. He repeated his greetings to the people with folded hands. But as he moved towards the mike, there was some commotion at one corner of the gathering. Someone told me that workers in one of the cotton mills in Delhi had gone on strike, and were seeking Pandit

Nehru's support for their demands. I thought the workers were being unseemly. They had chosen a wrong time and a wrong place for presenting their case. The nation was in the midst of a crisis. This was no occasion to pester a national leader with petty local problems. I also gathered that the Communists were at the back of the commotion. To hell with the Communists, I said.

But as I turned towards the rostrum again, what I saw was far more unseemly. Pandit Nehru was trying to get free of the grip in which he was being held by several Congress leaders who had thrown their hands round his arms and waist. He was being prevented from jumping down, and running towards the far corner in which the commotion had arisen. He seemed to be unaware of the crowd sitting in-between. One moment he was moving forward, and the next moment he was being pulled back. And all the time, he was shouting at the top of his voice. The mike reported him as saying, "*Dekhnā chāhtā hūn in kamīnōn kō main. Batā dēnā chāhtā hūn inkō ke main kōn hūn. Inki ye gandī harkatein main qatai bardāshī nahīn kar saktā* (I want to have a look at these lowbred people. I want to tell them who I am. I cannot tolerate this dirty behaviour on their part)." The commotion died down. The Congress leaders relaxed their hold on him. Suddenly, he straightened up as if he was going to get out of his boots. He stretched his right hand, full and upwards, and shouted, "*Main ēk shāndār ādmī hūn* (I am a man of some stature)." The crowd was clapping wildly, and continuously.

His speech that day was totally incoherent. It seemed as if he was talking to himself rather than addressing a rally. He kept on withdrawing in the next sentence what he had said in an earlier one. One moment he was denouncing the British as "a stone sitting on our breast". Next moment he was bubbling with sympathy for the cause of freedom and progress being defended by the Soviet Union. He was all for a fight to the finish so far as British imperialism was concerned. But at the same time he warned the people against coming in the way of the war effort. It was difficult to make out as to where he stood. I will not comment on the language he was speaking. I found it as shabby as on the earlier occasion.

Much worse came after the meeting dispersed. He descended from the rostrum and started moving towards the gate where I was standing. Congress volunteers had formed a cordon round him. But as the people rushed forward and tried to touch his feet, he pushed away the volunteers and started looking after himself. He was slapping with both his hands and kicking with both his feet the people who came near him. He

was wearing full boots. Some of his fans must have been badly hurt. I thought he had no business to treat his people in this cruel manner. After all, they were only trying to show their devotion to him in the only way they had learnt from their tradition.

A few days earlier, I had been to the Harijan Basti in North Delhi, where Mahatma Gandhi was staying. I had sat at his feet for more than an hour, without anyone trying to drive me out of the small cottage. He had made all of us laugh heartily as he tried to coax some rich men into giving him money for the Harijan cause, in amounts larger than those they had offered initially. Evening came, and he proceeded towards the prayer meeting. Volunteers had thrown a rope cordon round him. But people could not be held back. They rushed from every side, and crawled under the cordon to reach his feet. He stopped walking, and stood looking helpless. His face was beaming with love. He said in a husky voice, "*Būdhā hūn, mar jāūngā. Jākar bēth jāūn tō pachhī sir sē pair tak chhū lenā* (I am old. I will die. Let me get there and sit down. Then you can touch me from head to foot)."

I compared the behaviour of the two great national leaders when faced with crowds of their people. I could not help concluding that while Mahatma Gandhi was a son of the soil, at home in the midst of his people, Pandit Nehru was a Brown Sahib who loved to see the people crowd his meetings but who despised their culture. He looked like an alien who had strayed into a strange land. Whatever I saw or came to know of Pandit Nehru subsequently confirmed this conclusion. I will mention only one more instance.

I happened to be in Delhi towards the end of 1947 or in early 1948, and went to see my journalist friend from America. As I have mentioned, he had left Calcutta for Delhi soon after India became free. As I sat down with him in the Coffee House, he said, "Sita, who does this man think he is? Almighty God?" I asked him, "Who? What has happened?" He told me the story of some Sadhus who had sat down on an indefinite fast near Pandit Nehru's residence in New Delhi, and were seeking an assurance from him that cow-slaughter would be stopped now that the beef-eating British had departed. My friend said, "I had gone there to take some pictures, and gather a report. American readers love such stories from India. But what I saw was a horror for me. As I was talking to one of the Sadus who knew some English, this man rushed out of his house accompanied by his sister, Mrs. Pandit. Both of them were shouting something in Hindi. The poor Sadus were taken by surprise, and stood up. This man slapped the Sadu who had moved

forward with folded hands. His sister did the same. They were saying something which sounded pretty harsh. Then both of them turned back, and disappeared as fast as they had come. The Sadus did not utter so much as a word in protest, not even after the duo had left. They had taken it all as if it was the normal thing." I observed, "But in the case of Pandit Nehru, it *is* the normal thing. He has been slapping and kicking people all his life." He concluded, "I do not know the norm in your country. In my country, if the President so much as shouts on a citizen, he will have to go. We take it from no bastard, no matter how big he happens to be." I kept quiet.

Now that I have read Pandit Nehru's writings and speeches extensively, and know of the policies he followed, I can say with full confidence that this incurable bully was an incurable coward as well. One has only to piece together his behaviour pattern in different contexts, and towards different people. One can see quite clearly that at the time that he was crawling and cringing before Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Mulsim League, he was being high and mighty with the Hindu Mahasabha and its leaders. Later on, he was thundering against the RSS, and at the same time crawling before the Communists in India and abroad who were lambasting him as a running dog of American imperialism. He could never help licking the boot that kicked him, while heaping humiliations on those who were in no position to hit back, or who did not know how to tell him his place.

III

The story of how we started our anti-communist work in 1949 by supporting Pandit Nehru and his Government, and how we discovered in due course that the man was a committed Communist, has been told by me elsewhere.¹ Here I want to narrate the story of how I fared as a committed Hindu in an atmosphere surcharged with Nehruism.

My philosopher friend of college days had come to Calcutta in 1955 in connection with the publication of his Ph.D thesis. He was quite a Nehru fan at that time, and believed that everything was fine with India under Nehru. I added a proviso — "so long as you do not say or write something critical on subjects where Nehru has laid down the line." He would not believe me. I asked him to write a critical article on India's model of planning or on India's foreign policy, and get it published in some prestigious paper. He accepted the challenge.

¹ Preface to *In Defence of Comrade Krishna Menon: A Political Biography of Pandit Nehru*, New Delhi, 1963.

On his return to Delhi, he found that he had become famous among the economists there because of an article he had written on Socialism versus Capitalism. The article had been published in a learned journal in England, and hailed by some scholars of standing in that country as well as in France. A well-known professor of economics in the University of Delhi promised to create a special fellowship for him. The editor of a well-known weekly on economic affairs, published from Delhi, invited him to write a regular column. He, however, remembered my challenge. After contributing a few conventional articles to the weekly, he wrote a critique of India's planning. The editor published it all right, but told him plainly that no more articles from him were needed. And the professor dropped him like a hot potato as soon as he read his latest article. Next, he wrote a critique of India's foreign policy, and sent it to several dailies and weeklies of standing, one after another. All of them returned it with a typed chit regretting their inability to entertain it. He could confess only in an obscure weekly that he had lost the bet to me.

By the time I returned to Delhi in May 1957, Pandit Nehru was at the zenith of his power and prestige, in India and abroad. The Second Five Year Plan, patterned after the Soviet model, had been launched with great fanfare as the harbinger of a socialist era in India's history. The Americans had plumped for the Chester Bowles line that Nehru's "New India" was a great experiment in "democratic development" in contrast to the totalitarian path chosen by Red China. But these were minor compliments to the "greatest Indian after Asoka and Akbar". What he himself prized above everything else was his image as "the custodian of world peace". A sycophant press in India and a fellow-travelling one abroad, had built him up into larger than life-size. I found it difficult to believe my ears when I heard it again and again, and from people in long pants, that "but for the presence of Panditji at this critical juncture in human history, the two big powers will blow the earth to bits in an atomic holocaust". There was hardly a speech in public meetings or scholarly seminars which did not begin with the words, "as our beloved Prime Minister, the apostle of world peace, has pointed out..."

This was the heyday of delegations to and from the Communist countries, particularly the Soviet Union and Red China. Not a week passed without some notables returning from this or that Communist country, and making statements about the "wonders we have witnessed with our own eyes". At the same time, the Western democracies,

particularly the United States of America, were being painted in the darkest colours. They were the "enemies of peace, progress and prosperity of the people, particularly as regards the people of Asia". If one got branded as pro-American for whatever reason, one had to hang one's head in shame. Saying something less than flattering about Communist regimes, or Communist parties, or Communism itself, was the surest way to acquiring a pro-American reputation, no matter whether one was really for America or not. Those who counted in the public life of the country were either "progressives" of the correct brand, or were trying to pass as such. They took good care to frown upon or at least avoid all contact with those who had suffered the misfortune of being branded pro-American. Small wonder that as a pronounced and well-known anti-communist I was regarded as a "questionable character" in "respectable" circles.

This was also the heyday of what was known as voluntary effort for national development. Voluntary agencies had mushroomed in every field, all over the country. Every other "public spirited" person you met in those days, was either running a voluntary agency or was in the process of promoting one. Government departments in the Centre as well as in the States were prepared to finance every variety of voluntary effort, provided one could prove its need, which was not difficult for persons who knew the art of proving or the right people in the right places. On top of it all, American funding agencies were more than eager to finance all sorts of voluntary work, provided the promoters were "respectable" people in the eyes of the establishment. I came to know of an instance where the secretary of an established voluntary organization was placed privately on the payroll of an American funding agency so that he could persuade his organization to accept American aid, which it was reluctant to do otherwise. My professor of political science whom I met one day, advised me "to float my own racket, and to live lavishly ever after". He had become cynical about voluntary effort because he had seen through the hoax.

What I noticed particularly was that although the public atmosphere was reeking with anti-Americanism, privately the Americans were pretty popular even in the most "progressive" of all "progressive" circles. Nobody had any objection to America when it came to getting American money for voluntary effort, or going on America-sponsored trips abroad, or sending sons and daughters to American universities on American grants and scholarships. I came to know of quite a few blue-blooded Communists and fellow-travellers who guzzled bottles of

American whisky and gorged fancy American foods aplenty in private American homes while in public they poured pure venom against everything American. The Americans on their part felt comfortable only in the company of such characters, and frowned upon those who had got known as pro-American. I was told by an American professor, on a short visit to India, that this was a calculated operation for turning enemies into friends. But I failed to see any friendship for America surfacing anywhere in India.

My boss in the organization I had joined as a research consultant, was an old friend. We had been to the same school and college in Delhi. We had come closer when both of us became members of the intellectual circle which had grown round Ram Swarup in 1944. He had done quite commendable work in the field of refugee rehabilitation, and was now promoting Indian handicrafts on some scale. All in all, he had become quite important in the public life of Delhi. I felt grateful to him when he offered me a job as soon as he learnt that I was on the streets due to my anti-communist activities. The only condition he laid down was that I would do no politics. I understood, though he did not say it, that the ban included political writings as well. But he had counted without the "respectable" circles in which he lived and moved. It was not long before he was called upon to defend me from all sorts of attacks, from all sorts of quarters.

The first attack he had to face was mounted by the Americans. The Rural Development Department of his organization was receiving some financial assistance from the Cooperative League of America. I had nothing to do with this Department except that the research set-up in which I worked was housed in the same premises. One day I was sitting and chatting with a colleague when the American who headed the Cooperative League dropped in. I could see it immediately that there was hostility in his eyes. The talk turned to the character of American aid as compared with that from the Soviet Union. I observed that while America was taking care of our hearths and homes, the Soviet Union was taking care of our heads. The American blew up. He said, "You must be a very bad man to say all that!" I protested that we had not even been introduced to one another, and that while he was welcome to have his own opinions he was not entitled to call me names. He walked out in a huff.

It so happened that my boss as well as my colleague had been invited for dinner to this American's home on the evening of that very day. As they entered the house, they found that the American was lying

in bed, turning sides and saying "ah, oh". His bed was surrounded by several other Americans. My boss made enquiries about his health. All Americans present raised a chorus, "That Communist you have imported from Calcutta has insulted Mr. ... this morning. He has been feeling unwell since then." My boss thought at first that I must have given free reign to my sharp tongue, for which I was famous. But my colleague corrected him and narrated the whole incident. My boss told the Americans in firm tones that my reputation was the reverse of that of a Communist, that he would suffer no dictation regarding whom he employed in his organization, and that they were welcome to fold up their aid programme and quit in the next twenty-four hours. As he started walking out of the house, the Americans were on their knees with profuse apologies for the "misunderstanding". The American in charge of the Cooperative League was no more ill. He stood up hale and hearty, and said that he could not even dream of dictating any terms. The very next morning he tried to be friendly with me. I could not refuse to shake the hand he extended towards me. I did not know what had happened at his house the previous evening. The happening was related to me months after it took place, but not by my boss.

My research work consisted mainly of compiling reports of seminars that had been held, and preparing working papers for seminars to be held. It was an era of endless seminars. There was hardly a day when one seminar or the other was not held in Delhi. Most of the time in these gatherings was taken by people who had nothing to say but who found it difficult to keep their larynx under control. They felt most profound when pontificating on mere nothing. I also discovered some faces that were present in every seminar, whatever the subject. They never spoke a word during the proceedings but were quick to collect travelling, lodging, and conveyance expenses at the end of the session. One day I collared one of them who had collected a fat sum the previous evening for coming from and going to Ahmedabad, and staying in a hotel in Delhi for two days. I wondered how he could travel so fast to and from Ahmedabad as to attend a seminar the very next day. He told me without batting an eye that he had nothing to do with Ahmedabad except that he was born there, that he lived in Delhi with his family, and that collecting fees for attending seminars was his way of making a living. I could not help admiring the wise guy. He was getting something substantial out of the seminars.

My only satisfaction in that set-up was that I got plenty of time for renewing my studies. I have already narrated how I studied the classics

on Sanātana Dharma, ancient and modern. Here I want to narrate how I straightened my view of India's history. As I became aware of the greatness of Sanātana Dharma, I fell in love with the society which had been its vehicle down the ages. But the history I had read was hardly the history of Hindu society. It was the history of conquerors who had tormented the Hindus. I became curious about how Hindu society had survived so many assaults, for such prolonged periods, particularly from the Islamic invaders and the Christian missionaries. For, I had become aware that Hindu society was the only ancient society which had survived genocidal attacks from Islam and Christianity. All other ancient societies had succumbed to these crusading creeds or their latest variation — Communism. Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Japan were the only other exceptions. But then, these exceptions too were extensions, in a large measure, of India's ancient culture.

I was now convinced that Hindu society had survived because of some innate strength which had enabled it to fight and overcome all invaders in the long run. And I started studying India's history from the vantage point of this society. It was an eye opener. The conquerors were cut to their proper size when compared to Hindu heroes who had fought them. I started a series in the *Organiser* — Highlights of Hindu History. But I could not complete it due to some trouble with my eyes. I am still aspiring to write a history of India, even if in outline.

So Hindu society deserved all honour and homage. It held the key to deeper recesses of the human spirit. But what I saw all around me was just the opposite. Far from being honoured, Hindu society was being humiliated every day. And that too in its own ancient homeland. The ruling elite had been placed in power by the sweat and toil and endless sacrifices of this society. It was this society which had broken the back of Islamic imperialism. It was this society which had defeated the Christian missions from many countries. It was this society which had freed India from British rule. Yet the Hindu elite was ashamed of being known as a part of this society. It loved to be known as Socialist, Communist, Leftist, and the rest, but never as Hindu. In fact, the very word "Hindu" had been made a dirty word in post-independence India. One had only to identify oneself as a Hindu, and one stood branded as a narrow communalist, an obscurantist, a reactionary, an enemy of national unity, and what not. There was no stigma attached to being a Muslim, or a Christian, or a Buddhist, or a Jain, or a Sikh. But a Hindu who aspired to be respectable in the eyes of the ruling elite had to subscribe to Secularism, the new cult floated by Pandit Nehru and his

Communist cohorts. I wanted to know how and why the Hindus had yielded to this humiliation.

Meanwhile, my situation had improved somewhat for the better thanks to Comrade Mao Tse-tung. He had driven the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans out of their homeland, and occupied India's own territory in a series of incursions which Pandit Nehru was forced to admit in Parliament towards the end of 1959. Some friends who had avoided me so far started coming to me and discussing the nature of the menace from Red China about which I was known to have written a lot in earlier years. I told them that it was no time to discuss China anymore, and that what we needed now was military preparation. China had bared its face which Pandit Nehru and his kept press had tried to keep under a veil all these years. I could see quite clearly that a showdown with China was not far off, and that the country was prepared neither ideologically nor materially to face the challenge. I felt more and more angry with Pandit Nehru and his henchmen who were in control of India's establishment.

It had happened quite a few times that some Communist professor or writer came to our research department to meet one or the other of my colleagues. Whenever I was introduced to them, they said spontaneously, "Oh, you are that man!" I used to smile and tell them that I was pleased to know that they knew me so well when I had never heard of them. That had served to put them off. But the Communist I was introduced to in late 1959 was a well-known man. I had to admit that I knew him by his record in the service of the Soviet Union. He immediately launched a tirade, "Mr. Goel, when you people made all that noise about Hungary, we could understand. What happened in Hungary was a tragedy. It should not have happened. But when you make the same sort of noise about these dirty lamas, that is the limit." I lost my patience and told him that it was no use arguing with a Communist, and that the only thing that could penetrate his head was a bullet. His reference to the Tibetans as "dirty lamas" had made me feel mad. The Tibetans had done nothing that could justify the crimes that the Communist army from China was committing against them. He walked away after calling me a fascist. My heart sank. This man was very close to the Nehru brigade. I could guess which way the country was heading.

IV

Next year, I was loaned by my boss to Shri Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) to work as part-time secretary of the All India Panchayat Parishad

of which he was the president. I had met him a few times in earlier years. In fact, he was the first to whom Ram Swarup and I had gone in order to seek his blessings for our anti-communist work. He had said, "If you are opposed to Stalinism, I am wholly with you. But I see nothing wrong in Communism as such." I had asked him, "What about Leninism?" He had observed, "Leninism is all right." I had repeated a string of quotations from Lenin whom I had read recently. He had closed the discussion with the comment, "I don't know. My knowledge of Communist classics is quite old." So he was aware of my reputation, and had reacted rather negatively when my name was mentioned to him as a man who could help the Parishad stand on its feet. But he did not turn me down after I had had a brief talk with him at the Palam Airport where he had stopped on his way from Amritsar to Patna. He had gone to the Punjab to meet Master Tara Singh.

JP started liking me when he saw my work. But I could feel that he had reservations about my ideological inclinations. One day he asked me point-blank, "Are you a Socialist?" I said, "I have been." He continued, "That depends on one's evolution. What are you now?" I said, "I am a Hindu." He said, "That does not mean anything. I too am a Hindu." I blurted out, "I am not that sort of a Hindu." The next moment I was sorry for that remark. I could see that JP had not liked it. His face showed annoyance. But he was too much of a gentleman to put me in my place.

The showdown came unexpectedly. JP had invited an Englishman to deliver a lecture in the Panchayat Parishad. He was a retired policeman and had acquired the reputation of being a leading criminologist. I found that the man was an insufferable fool as soon as he opened his mouth. I wondered what JP had seen in him. The only explanation was JP's great weakness for the white skin. I had witnessed the weakness again and again. Now he sat enraptured as this arrogant Englishman poured unmitigated contempt on Hindu traditions, some of which he targeted as harbouring criminal tendencies. I stood up at the end of the lecture and asked him if he would answer some questions. He waved me aside, saying that he had no time for such tomfoolery. JP was furious with me soon after the man left. I had known that it was rather difficult for JP to lose his temper. But that day he did. He said to me angrily, "You have insulted my guest. I do not like such manners at all." I kept quiet.

Next day, I gave to JP my Hindi book, *Samyak Sambuddha*, which I had recently compiled from Buddhist classics. In its introduction I had

maintained that Buddhism was only a dimension of Sanātana Dharma which I had then proceeded to define. I requested JP to read just the introduction, if he could spare the time and had the inclination. I wanted him to know what I meant by Hinduism. JP said that he liked Buddhism very much, and that he would read the whole book. I had no hope that he would. But I was pleasantly surprised when I met him after a few days. He said, "I have to seek your forgiveness (*khsamā chāhtā hūn*) for losing my temper that day. I did not know that you were a scholar, and had made such a deep study of Buddhism. And I have simply fallen for the beautiful (*madhura*) Hindi you write." I was moved to tears, and touched his feet. He continued, "If Sanātana Dharma is what you say it is, I am all for it. You can count me as a Sanātanist from today. You can say to whomsoever you please that JP has become a Sanātanist." I felt very happy. My relations with JP became more or less smooth thereafter. I thought that my Hinduism was no more a matter of suspicion in his eyes. I have told elsewhere the story of how I was able to take JP on his first ever visit to an RSS camp.²

By now the Panchayat Parishad was in a functioning form. The constitution which I had drafted for it had been approved by the Ministry of Law, and the Ministry of Community Development had sanctioned a handsome grant for an Institute for Training in Panchayati Raj. The search was on for some competent Director to head the Institute when JP surprised everybody in the Governing Body of the Parishad by presenting a young man from Bombay to man the post. He had a doctoral degree in Chemical Engineering from a university in the USA. JP told us nothing more about him. But he looked at me, and said, "Sitaramji, he is a Muslim." I kept quiet. He said again, "Did you hear? He is a Muslim." Perhaps he was expecting that as a Hindu I would raise an objection. I raised none. I have never bothered about Muslims, one way or the other. Hindus who flaunt Muslims in order to prove their Secularism have always left me cold. Moreover, I had never fancied the Panchayat Parishad or any organization of that sort as my final destination. It was only a waiting room for me till such times as the train arrived for taking me where I wanted to go. Meanwhile, I was doing dutifully the work for which I was paid. I wondered why JP had tried to rub it in.

The staff in the Parishad and the Institute tried to involve me in

² Chapter 1 of *Perversion of India's Political Parlance*, Voice of India, New Delhi, 1984.

office politics with the new Director. They came to me with all sorts of stories about him. I refused to comment and disappointed them. One day, a man from Maharashtra dropped in. He had become famous for writing a report on "cooperative farming" after a brief visit to Red China. Pandit Nehru was using that report for introducing "joint farming" in this country. Years later, I learnt that his original report on "cooperative farming" in China had a chapter on how that programme had entailed a mass slaughter of peasants, and that he had dropped the chapter because Pandit Nehru thought it was not at all relevant. And this man was known at that time as a leading Gandhian. He sat down in front of me, and whispered, "Goelji, do you know that I am a Maratha?" I said, "Your name says it." He asked me next, "Do you know that we Marathas hate the Muslims?" I replied, "I have read Maratha history. I do not think your statement is true about all Marathas." He said, "In any case, I do not like Dr. ... whom JP has thrust upon us." I kept quiet. This man was in no way connected with the Panchayat Parishad. I could not understand why he was saying all this to me.

I came to know the game a few days later. JP called me and the Director for a meeting. As soon as we sat down, he turned to the Director and said, "You have no end of complaints against Sitaramji. Say in his presence what you have been saying to me, so that matters may be sorted out." The Director was non-plussed. He was not at all prepared for such a confrontation. For a few moments, he was struck dumb. His face was flustered. He recovered and said, "He told Shri ... that he hates Muslims." I narrated the conversation I had had with the noted Gandhian, word for word. JP smiled and said, "Shri ... has never been known for correct or careful reporting. Forget what he told you. Now, what is your next charge?" The Director fumbled, "He says that my degrees are fake." JP turned to me. I told him, "I would bother about degrees being fake or genuine only if I cared for them. Degrees have never meant anything to me. I have some good ones of my own." The Director had nothing more to say, and went away. JP asked me, "What degrees do you have? Can I see your bio-data?"

I had to compile it for the first time — my degrees, the certificates from my professors, the books I had written, and all that. As soon as JP finished reading it, he said to me, "What are you doing in organizations like the Panchayat Parishad? A man of your qualifications should be in the university. Find out who is the head of history department in Delhi. I will write to him, recommending you for a suitable teaching job." He wrote the letter next day when I gave him the name of the

Professor and Head of Department. It talked of me highly. But the Professor and Head was far from being impressed when I presented the letter to him. He looked at me without reading it, and said, "Oh! you are now in Delhi? Weren't you functioning from Calcutta?" The man was a fellow-traveller, as I found out soon after. JP received a reply a few days later. He read it and said to me, "It is a diplomatic letter. He will not let you have a job in the university. It seems he knows you quite well, and has strong reservations about you. I am sorry I cannot do more for you." I was more than thankful for what he had already done.

I had to leave the Panchayat Parishad after a few months. In spite of the confrontation between us in JP's presence, the Director had continued to poison JP's ears with all sorts of complaints against me. JP himself told me several times, "This person is full of venom against you." I kept quiet. I could sense that JP was feeling helpless. He could not drop the Director, though he was no more enamoured of him. JP's secularist image was at stake. At the same time, he was finding it difficult to overcome the feeling that my being a non-secularist Hindu had something to do with the trouble. One day he invited my boss and myself for sitting down and sorting it out. He started with what the Director had been saying. Suddenly, my boss stood up and pulled me up as well by taking hold of my hand. He said, "I am taking him away. He has done the job for which I had loaned him. Your Parishad is now functioning. And there is no dearth of work for him." We walked out. JP did not try to stop us. He must have felt relieved.

V

It was inevitable that as I tended to become more and more of a convinced and conscious Hindu, I felt drawn towards the RSS and to its political platform, the BJS, both of which had the reputation of being "Hindu communalist organizations". I assumed that what was being described as "Hindu communalism" by the Nehruvians must be Indian nationalism. I must confess that I was in for great disillusionment. I discovered before long that except for some differences on the cow question, the character of Muslim invaders, and the status of Hindu heroes who fought those invaders, these organizations shared the Nehruvian consensus on all important issues, domestic and foreign. The BJS was fast moving towards an all-out Nehruvian stance under the leadership of a pompous windbag who saw no reason to hide that he enjoyed the company of Communists far more than that of his party colleagues.

When I expressed for the first time a desire to meet him, the secretary of the BJS told me, in all seriousness, that if I dropped in the Communist Party office in Windsor Place any afternoon, I would not miss him provided he was not out of Delhi. What was worse, the RSS and the BJS stalwarts spent almost all their time and energy in proving that they were not Hindu communalists but honest secularists.

My first contact with the RSS had developed when I was a second year student in college and a devout Gandhian. One fine morning two of my classmates had descended on me in my room in the hostel. Both of them were science students, and I knew them only by their faces. They mentioned my short story in Hindi which had appeared in the college magazine and won a prize, and harangued me to write on Hindu Rashtra. They told me that they were members of the RSS, and promised to elect me as the next editor of the magazine as they had the majority among the students. I had never heard of the RSS so far, and knew nothing about Hindu Rashtra. The ideal for me was the Rāma-Rājya as expounded by Mahatma Gandhi.

We met quite often thereafter. I drew a blank when I asked them for some literature which their movement had produced. Instead, they took me to the Vijayadashamī show which I have already mentioned. And the contact broke down when I found my new friends telling me, day after day, fantastic stories about Mahatma Gandhi. They were trying to prove that the Mahatma was nothing but a stooge of the Muslim League and an agent of the Amir of Afghanistan. I had never heard or read such stories before.

I am happy to note that, in recent years, the RSS has revised its evaluation of Mahatma Gandhi and his role. I can also see it now that those old stories originated in an agonized consciousness which had witnessed for years Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress refusing to be identified as Hindu but having no qualms about bargaining with the Muslim League on behalf of the Hindus. It had become a habit with the Mahatma and the Congress to take the Hindus for granted. But at that time, and in that state of my total ignorance about national politics, those stories sounded more than repulsive.

My next contact with the RSS developed during the course of my participation in the anti-communist work in Calcutta. Our group had waited on leaders of the Congress and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) for seeking their cooperation in what we thought was a non-party national platform. Some of these leaders were impatient with our point of view, and advised us to fight Hindu communalism instead. Others were

nice, listened to us, and promised to call upon us in our office for further discussion. But none of them kept the promise. One day, a friend chided me for going to the wrong leaders, and took me to an RSS camp in Howrah. The leader I met there was more than sympathetic, and promised to visit our office as soon as the camp was over. He kept his promise, although our office had shifted to new premises in the meanwhile. He had gone to the old office, and found out our new address.

It was around this time that an Englishman who wrote regularly in the Calcutta weekly, *Capital*, characterised the RSS as a fascist organization. I knew him personally and as friendly towards our work. But I wrote to the weekly a letter saying that "those who call the RSS a fascist organization are fascists themselves". The letter was published. The Englishman telephoned to me next day. He said that he really did not know anything about the RSS, and that he had only followed the prevalent fashion. He was apologetic. Meanwhile, I had given a cutting of my printed letter to the RSS leader. He asked for a few more copies in print, which also I supplied. I came to know that he had circulated those copies in RSS circles in order to present me as a defender of the RSS against undeserved calumny. I did not know that it was an act of courage at that time to have a good opinion about the RSS. The opinion had come to me spontaneously as I started taking up a nationalist stand.

The help which this RSS leader provided to us in our anti-communist work was commendable. Some RSS young men managed our bookstalls in the Puja and other exhibitions, in the face of repeated threats from the Communists that they would allow no such "sacrilege in the heart of Calcutta". We came out with flying colours and sold a large number of our publications. Meanwhile, several RSS and BJS leaders visited our office and commended our work when they came to or passed through Calcutta in course their personal or party work. I came to know some of them quite well. But my greatest satisfaction was that the Congress and Socialist members of our group had met the "Hindu communalists" as comrades in a common battle, and shed some of their secularist self-righteousness.

One of the sequels of my contact with the RSS-BJS was that after we had to close down our anti-communist work, I was offered a BJS ticket for contesting from the Khajuraho parliamentary constituency in Madhya Pradesh during the Second General Elections in 1956-57. The local RSS worker, who was the manager of my campaign, had secured an assurance for support from the PSP. In the event, however, all arrangements broke down when that worker met an accident, and became

bed-ridden. Yet I could see the functioning of the RSS-BJS organization from close quarters. It had dedicated workers, and powerful speakers. The only thing the organization lacked was material resources. It was difficult for me to believe that a patriotic organization could be so poor. I had not yet met the Hindu Mahasabha people and did not know what poverty could really mean.

There were some revealing episodes during this election. The wall-posters which the BJS had got printed in Delhi, announced that one of the main BJS aims was to abolish untouchability. The field workers were against putting up these posters because they thought that the considerable conservative section in the electorate was likely to go against me in that event. But I stuck to my guns, and insisted that the posters be put up. I do not know if they were used. Secondly, I observed that the organizers of my public meetings did not relish my talk about principles involved between the Congress policies on the one hand, and the BJS policies on the other. They asked me, again and again, to go for the Congress men as dishonest Socialists and Secularists while presenting the BJS as an honest adherent of Socialism and Secularism. Thirdly, the organizers warned me not to plead for a ban on cow-slaughter, and not to say anything against Pakistan whenever the meeting happened to be in a Muslim locality. Lastly, they asked to use English words and phrases quite frequently in my speeches lest people concluded that I was uneducated. I did not relish these advices.

That was the background of my contact with the RSS-BJS when I returned to Delhi in 1957. The contact deepened in due course. I wrote quite often in the *Organiser*, and met RSS-BJS people more often. Most of them were quite friendly. The only unfriendly man I met was the windbag I have mentioned. His face showed a frown whenever he saw me, which was not unoften. The one suggestion which I made to every RSS and BJS leader I met, was that the movement should have a full-blooded Hindu ideology of its own and process all events, movements, parties, and public figures in terms of that ideology, rather than live on borrowed slogans or hand-to-mouth ideas invoked on the spur of the moment. They heard me patiently, and hardly ever contradicted me. But over a time, I realized that they did not take me seriously. Most of them were convinced that organization was all that mattered, and ideology was of little use. I was sure that they were greatly mistaken. I could see their plight quite clearly as they tried to operate according to ground rules laid down by their opponents. But they thought that my pre-occupation with ideology had something to do with my Communist

background. I felt helpless. I also felt annoyed when I heard speaker after speaker in RSS gatherings pouring contempt on "intellectuals" who had read the books but who knew nothing about "practical problems". One of their pet stories was about a pandit who frowned upon a boatman for not knowing Pāṇini, but whom the boatman pitied for not knowing swimming when the boat was in trouble.

What was most revealing to me about the RSS people was that, by and large, they did not react to expression of any opinion on any subject except that about their organization (*sangha*) and their leaders (*adhikāris*). One could say anything one chose about Hinduism, or Hindu culture, or Hindu society, or Hindu history, without drawing any reaction from an average RSS man. He became warm or cold only when something favourable or unfavourable was said about his organization, or his leaders, or both. I wondered what sort of a Hindu organization it was. I expected the RSS to be alive to Hindu causes rather than to the reputation of its organization or its leaders.

One day, a BJS leader asked me to write a book presenting the BJS to the West. I said that I knew very little about the BJS, and that it would be better if the job was undertaken by one of their own scholars. He said that the problem was that they had no scholars in their organization. I agreed to write the book but warned him that it would be pretty critical on the score of their policies. He showed surprise. He told me in a tone full of pity for me that I was a talented man, and could move up high in their organization provided I wrote the book and removed from his people's minds the lingering suspicion about me. I asked him, "What suspicion?" He smiled and said, "You ought to know. Most of our people think that you are..." He did not complete the sentence. I completed it for him, "... an American agent." I had to control myself. I told him that if any of his people needed a certificate for patriotism any day, he could come and get it from me. That was the end of my dalliance with the BJS.

My disillusionment with the RSS took some more time. The country was moving towards a clash with Red China. People had become dissatisfied with Pandit Nehru's foreign policy. But they believed that the Prime Minister had been misled by his Defence Minister and close confidant, Shri V.K. Krishna Menon. Few people were prepared to accept that the real architect of the nation's tragedy was Pandit Nehru himself. Menon was no more than Nehru's minion, with no standing of his own either in the Congress Party or in the country at large. By now I had read almost all published writings and speeches of Pandit Nehru,

and come to know him as a committed Communist. He had credited Red China with the work of "socialist construction" at home, and had been going about proclaiming that a "socialist country can harbour no hostile designs towards its neighbours". My problem was how to share my perception with my people. The press in India was more or less completely under the control of Communists, or fellow-travellers, or self-seeking sycophants.

I was, therefore, very happy when the RSS leader whom I had met in Calcutta and who had now moved very high in his organization, invited me to document Nehru's ideology in a series of articles in the *Organiser*. Starting with its issue of June 5, 1961, I wrote 17 articles under the general caption, *In Defence of Comrade Krishna Menon*. I was writing under a pseudonym, Ekaki. Not many people knew who was the writer. At least my boss was completely unaware that I had violated the pledge I had given to him. The articles were read widely in circles which normally never read the *Organiser*.

I was, therefore, surprised when I was collared one day by the windbag of the BJS, and rebuked roundly for writing "all that nonsense about the leader of the nation". I talked to the editor, who told me that he could not keep the secret from a man who was the topmost leader of the BJS. He also told me that the man had asked him not to have anything to do with "that notorious man (*badnām ādmī*)". I wanted to go to the windbag and ask him what crime I had committed except exposing the character of Communism and its instruments. But I did not care so long as I had the support of the RSS leader, whom I met every week. He was full of praise for my series.

My sixteenth article had just appeared. The RSS leader told me to go on, and not to stop till I reach "Nehru's policy in the present situation". He added that my series "had brought about a revolution in the thought of our people", that they were planning to publish the series in a book form as soon as it was finished, and that they would make it available to the people in lakhs of copies in all Indian languages. I felt satisfied with my work. My seventeenth article was already in the press. And I was preparing to move over to Pandit Nehru's policy vis-a-vis Red China.

But I was fated not to finish the series. When I met the RSS leader next week, I heard something which was just the opposite of what I expected. As I entered his room, he said in a cold and calculated tone, "*Sitārāmji, apko Nehru ke sivāy kyā koi kām nahīn hai? Akhir Nehru ne aisā kyā kar diyā jo ap hath dhokar uske piche pad gaye?*" (Mr. Sitaram,

do you have nothing to occupy you except Nehru? What has Nehru done to make you run after him with hammer and tongs?)” I was taken aback, and did not know what to say. The editor of the *Organiser* happened to drop in just at that moment. The leader barked at him, “*Yeh kyā Nehrū Nehrū lagā rakkhā hai? Apnē paper kā yeh kyā banā dālā tumnē? Band karō yēh Nehrū Nehrū. Kyā aur koi topic nahin bachā?* (what is this cant about Nehru? What have you made of your paper? Stop this Nehru business. Is there no other topic left?)” The editor did not say a word. He was under RSS discipline. I fell from the skies. It was very difficult for me to believe that the man sitting in front of me with a grim face and unfriendly eyes was the same man who had praised my series so highly only a week ago. But that was the stark truth.

The country was at war with Red China soon after my seventeenth article appeared. I was being harassed by the Government. As soon as the first shots were fired on the northern border, I discovered that an intelligence man was following me wherever I went. He stood outside my office when I was there, and outside my home till late in the nights. One day, a friend informed me that I might get arrested very soon. He said that a rabid Nehruite had seen me sitting in the Coffee House, and wondered why an “anti-government person like Goel” was going scott free. He was a minor fry at that time but quite close to the establishment. Later on, he became a Minister in Indira Gandhi’s Government, and our ambassador in Moscow. Recently, he was an important Minister in the Janata Dal Government of Shri V.P. Singh. I had been told by one of his classmates in Lahore that he was a card-carrying Communist in pre-Partition days. I could very well understand why he felt annoyed with me. He was one of that mob which had been riding on Mao’s bandwagon when I was writing against the monster. I reminded the likes of him of their traitorous ways, and they felt uncomfortable whenever they saw me. But they were still in power, and I was nobody. I thought it wise not to annoy him. I stopped going to the Coffee House. I did not want to be in jail.

Eventually, I was not arrested for a rather strange reason. My name happened to be not only in the list of “anti-Government elements” but also in the list of “patriots” who were expected to wage a guerrilla war against China. It was November, 23, 1962. There was a strong rumour that India was going to be air-bombed by China very soon. I received a telephone from a Congress MP. She was a member of the Rajya Sabha. I hardly knew her, having met her briefly in Calcutta where she was

staying with a friend of mine on her return from Red China in 1954. She had seen the wonderland as a member of the parliamentary delegation led by Renu Chakravarty, the Communist MP in the Lok Sabha. She had seen my books on China at my friend's place, and invited me for a talk. She had said, "The horror that you have depicted in your books is nothing compared to what I have seen with my own eyes." My friend had asked her to take the country into confidence as people were being misled by Communist propaganda. She had barked back, "What are your intentions, young man? Do you want me to be a persona non grata with the Prime Minister?" Next morning her name was second in the joint statement saying that everything was wonderful in China. I had never met her again. Now she asked me to see her immediately.

As soon as I entered her drawing-room, she asked me to accompany her to see the Home Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri. She told me that she had seen my name in the list of those who were likely recruits for the forthcoming guerrilla force, and taken the responsibility of producing me as soon as she could find me. According to her, the Government feared that the Chinese would occupy the whole of Eastern India, and estimated that it would take us years to liberate the land. As I had lived in that area and knew its people as well as its languages, I had been selected as excellent guerrilla material. I told her that on the one hand there was a move to put me behind the bars, and on the other I was being viewed as a soldier in the service of the nation. She laughed and said that most of the time the right hand of the Government did not know what its left hand did, and that I should not mind such "pin-pricks". But I minded, and walked out, saying that so long as Pandit Nehru was the Prime Minister of the country, I could be only a traitor to it. Years later I learnt that there was actually a move to organize a guerrilla force under the leadership of Shri Biju Patnaik.

Months passed and the vigil on me was withdrawn. I must confess that I was frightened all the while. I had a large family, and I was the only bread-earner. My old parents understood no politics. My children were still in school and college. I kept lying low. But the conviction that the truth about Pandit Nehru should be made known was still quite strong. So I thought of publishing my series as a book. It was far from finished. Still the facts it revealed about the Prime Minister went quite far. After a whole year had passed, I approached Vaidya Gurudatta who had read my series and liked it. He got it published in December, 1963.

I was feeling happy once again when Ram Swarup told me that my boss was under some sort of a pressure because of my book. I went to

him straight and asked him about the nature of the trouble. He became angry, and said, "There are Communists in our organization, and Socialists, and Jan Sanghis. All of them have freedom to express their opinions. Why should people object when you say what you believe intensely? This is supposed to be a democratic country. I am not going to yield, whatever the consequences." I told him that I did not want to jeopardise his position, and that he could provide protection to me again if he stayed in his place. Then I called his stenographer and dictated the draft of a letter terminating my services with immediate effect. My boss objected. "I thought," he said, "you were resigning. I am not *sacking* you." I said, "I have no honour to save. I am not going to get another job in Delhi. The only gain I care for right now is the three months' salary I will get if I am sacked. What do I get if I resign?" He got the draft typed, and signed it. As he handed the letter to me, I could see him fighting tears in his eyes. It was January 1964. I was on the street once again.

VII

In the year 1964, Pandit Nehru was in no better position. He was alive. But the pep in him was gone. So also the bluster which he had used all his life to beat down his opponents. It was only the "progressive" brood he had spawned which was keeping his corpse propped up on the throne in the interest of its own survival. The leader was being made to look like a colossus in the very hour of his complete collapse. I remember very vividly what happened in the aftermath of our humiliation at the hands of the Chinese Communists in the winter of 1962.

The house that Pandit Nehru had built lay in shambles all around him. His pretensions as the custodian of world peace had been badly punctured by those very Chinese Communists whom he had promoted no end, and from every platform. In fact, he had become the laughing stock of the world in view of the sermons he had read to it earlier, day in and day out. The Soviet Union which he had served so well through thick and thin, and for years, had come out openly on the side of "our Chinese brethren". His Arab and Afro-Asian friends stood strictly aloof, practising the art of non-alignment they had learnt from the past-master. And he was crying desperately for help from quarters he had decried all along as "the camp of capitalism, colonialism, and war".³

³ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Vol. III, OUP, 1984, pp. 211-19. The letter which Pandit Nehru wrote to President John F. Kennedy of the USA in November, 1962 has remained suppressed so far. People will know the pathetic state to which he had been reduced whenever that letter is published.

Nearer home, the Communist Party of India which he had patronized and promoted into a formidable political apparatus, was shying away from him. The majority in it will soon swear allegiance to Chairman Mao. The Muslim "minority" which had prospered no end under his Secularism, was more than happy at India's defeat and humiliation. It will wait for Pakistan to profit from India's predicament. The Second Five Year Plan which he had hailed in the hope that India would soon emerge as an industrial giant, had brought the country to the verge of a country-wide famine. His immediate successor, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, will face the grim situation in 1965-66.

By every canon of normal human reason and political sanity, it was time for stock-taking. The people at large were waiting for the discredited leader and his decrepit team to depart from the scene. They were in a mood to stand up and say, "You have been here too long for whatever worth you are. Now, in God's name, go!" But what I saw was the other way round. The leader as well as the team walked out of the turmoil not only unscathed but triumphant and truculent. The stock-taking that took place was in the camp of the innocents.

Pandit Nehru had been in the habit of threatening to resign, every now and then. It was his patent method of making the people protest that he was indispensable, and that the country would face ruin without him at the helm. He had succeeded every time in raising a storm in his favour, and discrediting whomsoever he chose to hound out of public life. This time he kept sticking to the throne like a limpet. In the words of Brigadier Dalvi, he did not have the decency even to go through the motions of resigning. All he had to do was to compose some poetry about "getting out of touch with reality in the modern world" and "living in an artificial atmosphere of our creation,"⁴ and the establishment asked the people to shed tears. The flock of the faithful as well as the sycophants sprang into action as never before. A cry reverberated across the country that Nehru's hands needed strengthening for "beating back the reactionaries who want to put the clock back, and tiding over the national crisis". A mammoth procession led by Comrade S.A. Dange marched to the Parliament house, thundering in support of the "Great Leader and his policies of peace and progress". I saw Pandit Nehru with my own eyes, standing on the parapet and watching the procession as it reached near the northern gate of the Parliament house. But the very next day he denied that he was there.

The climax of this calculated operation was reached in the Kamrai

⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

Plan which followed soon after. Congress leaders who had had no say in the shaping of national policies, foreign or domestic, were eased out of the positions they held in the Government, both at the Centre as well as in the States. They were "needed for party work among the people". Nobody was deceived. Mahavir Tyagi told Pandit Nehru to his face, "*Yārōñ kē sir kaṭa kar sardār ban gayē* (so you have become the head-man by getting the heads of your comrades chopped off)!" But nobody dared challenge the cynical exercise. Pandit Nehru and his flock had had another field day.

Had Pandit Nehru been only an individual who had risen to the top on the strength of his own merit, or because circumstances had conspired to catapult him into power, his glory would have departed when his leadership suffered a serious set-back in 1962. The human norm that nothing succeeds like success and nothing fails like failure, would have applied to him also. Had the ideology he had espoused been his personal choice, it would have gone into oblivion with the tragic end of the era over which he had presided. But what has happened is just the opposite. The graver the faults that have come to notice in Pandit Nehru's character as a man, as a political leader, and as a thinker, the more frantic has been the effort to prop up his image. The greater the failure that policies pursued by him have suffered, the louder has been the clamour to continue them in their pristine purity. It appears that a whole establishment has been hell-bent on selling Pandit Nehru as a permanent hero, and Nehruism as a panacea for all ills, at all times.

Small wonder that the "great man's daughter", Mrs. Indira Gandhi, succeeded in riding roughshod over all sorts of "reactionaries" in the Congress Party and the country at large. The "progressives" flocked to her camp from every corner, and made her loom large like her father. She surrounded herself with Communists and fellow-travellers of all hues, recruited directly and openly from the Communist Party of India and its fronts. They helped her to the hilt to push her father's policies farther afield. In the bargain, they monopolized all positions of power and prestige in the Congress Party, in the Government, in the voluntary agencies, in the media and the academia, in short, in the whole establishment. A Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was created for collecting Stalinist professors from all over the country, and financed on a fabulous scale. The arrogance with which the "professors" started speaking on every subject under the sun, had to be known in order to be believed.

In the next few years, the Nehruvian flock multiplied fast, and

several fold. Now it felt strong enough to demand a committed Congress Party cadre, a committed Parliament, a committed press, a committed judiciary, a committed bureaucracy, and a committed armed force. The only commitment which was neither remembered nor mentioned any more was the commitment to democracy that had been sold, particularly by Pandit Nehru's supporters in the USA, as the hallmark of India's "experiment in Socialism". Nehruism had come out in its true colours. The country had been reduced to a private fief of the Nehru dynasty, and pulverized by those who pretended to be its custodians.

The emergency that followed was not at all an ad hoc idea adopted for meeting an abrupt situation. The idea of imposing an authoritarian rule on the country had been maturing in the mind of the Nehruvian flock for years before it materialized in the life of the people. The situation, too, was being shaped in that direction by the self-righteousness and consequent high-handedness that had accompanied the idea. The seeds sown by Pandit Nehru were flowering, and bearing fruit. Once again, his flock was in the forefront of the "battle being waged for beating back the forces of fascism". And by the time Mrs. Indira Gandhi realized what was happening on the ground, it was already too late. Much mischief had been done in the meanwhile. Key institutions of the country had been subverted. They have never been the same again.

The story of how I survived and stood on my feet once more is no uncommon story. There is no dearth of people in the world who suffer setbacks, struggle, and come up again. Sometimes it is help from unexpected quarters. Sometimes it is hard work. Sometimes it is sheer good luck. In my case it was all three. A cousin came to my help, and gave me not only moral support but also the material means I needed. I worked very hard. Above all, I had lots of good luck. In the next four years, I succeeded in building an independent business.

During the years 1964–1977 I took no part in the public life of the country. I just watched the events unfolding and taking the country downhill. A friend taunted every now and then that I was after all a "bloody *baniā* (merchant)" who had reverted to his right profession. Another friend complained that he missed my style of writing, though he had never liked that style. What could I say? I was in no position to convince anyone about anything.

There was a brief interlude in 1967–69 when various opposition parties came together and formed *Samyukta Vidhāyaka Dal* (SVD)

Governments in various States all over North India. But most of it was no more than a show of rowdyism which rehabilitated the Congress Party in the eyes of the people. For the rest, it was Mrs. Indira Gandhi's show till she imposed the Emergency in June, 1975.

My participation in public activity in 1977, on the eve of the historical General Elections, was brief. I was invited to join a group which was entrusted with the job of preparing press releases for the combine which was ranged against Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It was in this group that I met Shri Arun Shourie for the first time. What I noted about him was that he was extremely polite and soft-spoken. I had no notion at that time that in the years to come he was going to emerge as the foremost scholar-journalist and to present national problems in a correct prospective.

People's enthusiasm for the combine against Mrs. Indira Gandhi had to be seen in order to be believed. The meetings addressed by leaders of the opposition attracted vast crowds. On the other hand, the meetings of the Congress Party, even those addressed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, were thinly attended. I saw a meeting in which there was no audience, only the Congress leaders sitting on a large platform. The man who had supplied the carpets and the chairs was worried that his goods were going to be stolen as nobody was sitting on them.

Equally unprecedented were the scenes when the results came out. My journalist friend from America was in Delhi. By now he had become the Chief Editor of the prestigious *Forbes Magazine* published from New York. He was amazed when he saw the people dancing in the street outside newspaper offices on Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg. He said he had not witnessed such scenes when India became independent in 1947.

I must confess that I was also carried away by the popular enthusiasm, and thought that things were going to change at last. The only one I saw keeping his cool, was Ram Swarup. He was happy that the Emergency was over. But he did not expect much from the combine which soon became the Janata Party. He said to me several times that people did not change simply because they gave themselves a new party label. He had been saying for some time that in India there was a multiplicity of parties but a unity of slogans. He proved right in a matter of days. The Janata Party turned out to be another bunch of rowdies except for its Jana Sangh component, and reminded one of the SVD days.

I had lost contact with the RSS-BJS leaders after my experience

with them in 1962. But I had not lost interest in what was regarded as the only Hindu movement still alive. The Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha had become more or less moribund. The Ramakrishna Mission and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram were busy proving that they were "universal" rather than Hindu. But the reports I received about developments in the RSS-BJS were pretty depressing.

The BJS had been taken over more or less completely by the windbag. He shared not only Pandit Nehru's ideology but also the latter's temper when it came to dealing with party colleagues. He had succeeded in silencing or hounding out those few in the BJS who had the courage to say that they did not subscribe to the Nehruvian consensus on Socialism, Secularism, Non-Alignment, and the rest. I wondered whether all this was happening with the active or passive assent of the RSS bosses. Some people said, yes. Others said that the RSS bosses were helpless in the face of the windbag's popularity and pull with the crowds.

I had a chance to go to a public meeting addressed by the windbag in December, 1971. We were at war with Pakistan over the liberation of Bangladesh. The latest reports said that a US fleet had sailed from Bangkok and was heading towards the Bay of Bengal. It was a time for worry. But the windbag thundered, "*Amrikā kā jō bēḍa Bangāl kī khādi kī aur badh rahā hai, uskā ēk jahāz wāpas nahīn jānē pāyē* (not a single ship of the American fleet advancing towards the Bay of Bengal, should be allowed to go back)." The crowd gave him a standing ovation. I wondered whether he knew what the US fleet represented, and I walked away. It was the first public meeting of the windbag which I had ever attended. It proved to be the last.

The metamorphosis of the RSS was no less noticeable. The RSS had never cared to understand Islam or its dynamics in India. I had heard with my own ears Guru Golwalkar proclaiming from a public platform that he honoured Islam no less than his own Hindu Dharma, that the Quran was for him as holy as the Veda, and that he regarded Prophet Muhammad as one of the greatest men known to human history. Some RSS leaders, therefore, felt fulfilled when they came in close contact and fraternized with the mullahs of the Jam'at-i-Islāmi, while they were together in jail during the Emergency. I myself heard some of them saying, "We were in the dark about Islam till we met these Muslim divines. Now we know what Islam really stands for." I asked one of them, "Have you ever studied the classics of Islam on your own? How could you judge that what the mullahs were selling to you

was not misinformation?" He smiled, and dismissed me as incorrigible. I could see that there was a will to believe in what the mullahs had presented as Islam. There was no problem if Islam was that wonderful. It was as simple as that.

So the RSS-BJS had fallen fully in line with the Nehruvians and earned in full measure the treatment they received from the Congress and Socialist components in the Janata Party. In spite of the fact that the RSS-BJS had suffered the most and sent the largest number of men to jail during the Emergency, and in spite of the fact their presence in the Parliament was also the largest, their status in the Janata Party was no more than that of cup-bearers whom anybody could kick. To start with, there was a whispering campaign that the Party was in danger of being taken over by "the communalists". Next, the Socialists launched an open campaign that either the RSS should become boy scouts of the Janata Party or the Jana Sanghis in the Party should sever their relation with the RSS. Finally, the RSS was asked to drop the word "Hindu" from its constitution and admit Muslims in its ranks.

The windbag who was the leader of the Jana Sangh group in the Janata Party endorsed the demand of the Socialists. He wrote an article in the *Indian Express* saying that the RSS was after all a political movement, and as such should have no hesitation in parting with its "cultural pretensions". Shri L.K. Advani was the only one in the Jana Sangh group to state publicly that he was proud of his association with the RSS. But he had counted without the RSS bosses. They readily agreed to consider the Socialists' proposal in their next General Body meeting. The situation was saved only by the fall of the Janata Government in 1979.

A friend who was an insider of the Janata Party told me that the Soviet President, Kosygin, who was on a visit to India during the Janata Party days, did not feel quite sure how his meeting with the Minister of External Affairs would turn out. He was under the impression that the Minister belonged to a "reactionary" movement. But when he met the Minister, he was pleasantly surprised to find that "this guy is more progressive than my own Communist comrades in India". There was a move to replace our ambassador in Moscow appointed during the Indira Gandhi regime. The ambassador was known to be Moscow's man rather than India's envoy. The Minister put down his foot — "Nothing doing. He is one of my best friends." He also tried to get into the Rajya Sabha a well-known columnist who has been a life-long Hindu-baiter and an ardent advocate of every Islamic cause. Failing that, the Minister

pulled away Syed Shahabuddin from the latter's desk in the External Affairs Ministry and sent him up to the Rajya Sabha as "the right type of Muslim leader we have been looking for". The Syed has not failed his sponsor in India's politics.

The crowning glory of the windbag, however, was the formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the formulation of its philosophy as Gandhian Socialism. In the new party's flag, the green colour of Islamic *jihād* shared honours with the *bhagwa* (ochre) colour of Hindutva. Nobody in the RSS or the BJP seemed to know or cared to remember what the Islamic colour had stood for in the history of India, and what it signified for India's future. So we had one more platform for shouting Nehruvian slogans. Only it proved to be one too many in the 1984 General Elections. People decided to vote for the original and the genuine Congress Party rather than for its carbon copy.

VIII

I resumed my regular meetings with Ram Swarup in 1977, after a long lapse during which I was busy building a business. By now I was more or less free from family responsibilities also. The discussions that developed were very rewarding. The most frequent theme was the character of Islam and Christianity, and what these closed creeds aspired to do to our people and culture.

Meanwhile, Islam had resumed its offensive in India. Petro-dollars from oil-rich Islamic countries were pouring in for equipping all sorts of Islamic missionaries and militants. A Muslim weekly had put it straight. Allah, it said, was not a fool to have put all that wealth under the floor of Islamic countries. Muslims, it asserted, were meant to be masters of the world. And India, it pointed out, was their unfinished business. Similar articles had appeared elsewhere in the Islamic world.

At the same time, the Christian missionary apparatus had perfected its theologies of Indigenization and Liberation. The theologians had no doubt that India was destined to be the land of Jesus Christ. Leading lights of the national revival such as Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi were being portrayed as devotees of "the only Son of the only True God".

The most depressing aspect of the whole situation, however, was that there was practically no voice of protest against these forces of subversion. The methods and means which these forces were mobilizing had not even been noticed. The only movement which was supposed to be a Hindu movement and expected to come to the defence of

Hindu society and culture, was busy proving its secularist credentials. The Janata Party swore more by Mahatma Gandhi than by Pandit Nehru. But it was not the Mahatma Gandhi who had proclaimed that he was a staunch Sanātanist Hindu. Instead, it was a Mahatma Gandhi invented by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia for window-dressing his own variety of Secularism. Small wonder that Imam Bukhari of the Jāma' Masjid in Delhi was striding the scene like a colossus. Politicians of all hues were paying homage to him. He had never had it so good.

Ram Swarup was feeling disturbed. He had no doubt that Hindu society was in for great trouble. He had been studying the scriptures of Islam and Christianity during the past several years, and had gone deep into their most orthodox sources. He had come up with the conclusion that they were not religions but cruel and intolerant ideologies like Communism and Nazism. The spread of these ideologies in India, he said, was fraught with fearful consequences for whatever had survived of Hindu society and culture in the only Hindu homeland.

Around this time, I had an occasion to read the typescript of a book he had finished writing in 1973, and laid aside. It was a profound study of Monotheism, the central dogma of both Islam and Christianity, as well as a powerful presentation of what the monotheists denounce as Hindu Polytheism. I had never read anything like it. It was a revelation to me that Monotheism was not a religious concept but an imperialist idea. I must confess that I myself had been inclined towards Monotheism till this time. I had never thought that a multiplicity of Gods was the natural and spontaneous expression of an evolved spiritual consciousness.

My mind went back to 1949 when I had read Ram Swarup's typescript, *Russian Imperialism: How to Stop It*. He had followed it up in 1950 with his *Communism and Peasantry: Implications of Collective Agriculture for Asia*. These books had made me sit up vis-a-vis the menace which Communism represented. Now I sat up vis-a-vis the menace represented by Islam and Christianity. I decided to publish Ram Swarup's new magnum opus. It was titled *The Word As Revelation: Names of Gods* when it was brought out in 1980. Our friend from college days and now the Chief Editor of *The Times of India*, Girilal Jain, rang me up after reading this book, and said, "Sita, Ram Swarup has written the book of *his* life, and you have published the book of *your* life." It was reviewed in *The Times of India* by the noted Aurobindonian, Dr. Sisir Kumar Ghosh, under the caption, "Return of the Gods". The reviewer had pin-pointed the central theme in Ram Swarup's reflections.

As our discussions developed, I found that Ram Swarup was concerned more about the menace from Islam than that from Christianity. He observed that Christianity had had its teeth knocked out in the modern West, and that though it was still capable of doing considerable mischief in India, it was bound to collapse as soon as its rationalist review in the West became known to our people. Islam, on the other hand, had so far remained free from even a rationalist review. Hindu saints and scholars had hardly ever questioned its exclusive and superior claims. The only exception was Swami Dayananda. In recent times, the Hindu refrain had been that Islam taught the same truths as Hinduism. The slogan of *sarva-dharma-samabhāva* was providing grist to the mills of Secularism, the smoke-screen behind which Islam and Christianity were stealing a march. Add to it the systematic distortion of India's history which the Stalinist historians of Aligarh and the JNU had undertaken from their power positions in the Nehruvian establishment. They were insisting that Islamic heroes be accepted as national heroes, while they were converting Hindu heroes into villains.

Ram Swarup was not satisfied with a merely rationalist review of Islam and Christianity. He wanted these ideologies to be processed from the point of view of yogic spirituality of Sanātana Dharma. And he had developed the framework for placing these creeds where they belonged in the scale of yogic consciousness.

Our problem, according to Ram Swarup, was not Muslims but Islam. An overwhelming majority of Muslims in India (including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) were our own people. They had been alienated from us by Islam. But Hindu society had remained preoccupied with the Muslim behaviour pattern, while bestowing praises on Islam as a great religion. This was suicidal for Hindu society. The Muslim behaviour pattern had to be traced back to the belief system which sanctioned it. It was the belief system which had to be exposed.

A marked feature of the Muslim behaviour pattern had been the Muslim proneness to take to the streets on the slightest pretext. Street riots had been used by Islam as a major weapon for carving out Pakistan. They were being used in the India that remained for enforcing all sorts of Muslim demands. And street riots by Muslims cannot be stopped unless Islam was cured of its aggressive self-righteousness. Hindus were doing exactly the reverse of what should be done. They were blaming the Muslims and not Islam which provided the inspiration for street riots.

Ram Swarup was sure that the only effective way to stop street riots was to move the Hindu-Muslim dialogue from the streets to the level of human minds. That was possible only if Hindus studied Islam from its own sources, and rejected its claims. So long as Hindus recognized Islam as a religion, it was unlikely to shed its aggressiveness and accept peaceful coexistence. We had the precedents of Christianity and Communism before us. Christianity in the West had to shed its self-righteousness and reform itself when it was subjected to a free and frank discussion in modern times. The ideological spread of Communism also had come to a halt in the Western democracies when Western scholars examined its tenets and made them known to the people at large.

One day in late 1981, I put it to Ram Swarup, "I have completed sixty years of my life. I have done whatever I was destined to do for my family. If you feel that I can be of help to the cause of Hinduism, I can retire from business and take to writing again. I should like to devote the rest of my life to informing Hindu society about its own great heritage, as also about the dangers it faces. Only I would have to consult my sons, and find out if they can spare me for a work dear to my heart." Ram Swarup gave his consent.

I placed the proposal before my sons the very next day. Their response was more than positive. One of them observed, "You can do business as well as this other work. Business is something which we also can manage. But you alone among us can undertake the other work. We are prepared to take over the business whenever you want to be free from it. We can always consult you if we have any problem." I was very happy to hear that from them. The VOICE OF INDIA was born that day, though Ram Swarup suggested that name several days later.

My next problem was how to resume writing on subjects relevant to the new situation. I had lost the habit of writing on serious subjects, having written nothing except business letters and account books over the past fifteen years. It was quite a struggle to rearrange appropriate ideas in my mind, and put them down on paper. For several weeks, all I could create were heaps of torn sheets. But I was keeping the company of Ram Swarup. It was not too long before my pen started writing coherent sentences..

Strangely enough, Shri K.R. Malkani, editor of the *Organiser*, had never given me up as a writer. He had continued to write letters to me all these year, suggesting subjects on which I could contribute articles to his weekly. I had thought that it was very kind of him, though I had never replied to his letters. Now I went to his office, and asked him if

he would consider a few series which I had in my mind. He agreed immediately.

That is how those series started, one after another — *How I Became A Hindu, Hindu Society Under Siege, An Experiment with Untruth, Defence of Hindu Society, History of Heroic Hindu Resistance to Islamic Invaders*. I was now spending several afternoons every week in the office of the *Organiser*, seeing proofs, meeting other visitors, and talking to Shri Malkani. I was my old self once again. Now I found it difficult to believe that I had been a businessman for more than fifteen years.

I discovered it in due course that my series in the *Organiser* were being noticed in the secularist circles. A secularist scribe whom I chanced to meet at a friend's place asked me in a resentful tone, "How many series do you plan to write?" I told him, "One hundred, unless I die or become bed-ridden in the meanwhile." And I meant it. I had many themes in my mind. I was spending long hours at my desk, scanning source materials and writing articles.

What encouraged me most at this time was the spate of letters I received from the readers. They came to my own address as well as to the editor of the *Organiser*. They came from all parts of India, and also from abroad, particularly the UK and the USA. All of them were full of praise for my knowledge of facts, and my capacity to put them across in a proper perspective. I felt grateful to the readers. I also felt embarrassed once in a while when I was compared to some stalwart of Hindu awakening in the recent past. One letter was very brief, and was addressed to the editor. It said that "Sita Ram Goel is the most wonderful thing that has happened to the *Organiser*". I must confess that I felt flattered.

And then it happened again. The blow that came was not as swift and sudden as last time. But it was a blow all the same. The only difference was that this time it did not leave me shattered, as it had done on the previous occasion.

I was reviewing H.V. Seshadri's book, *The Tragic Story of India's Partition*, in a series captioned *Muslim Separatism: Causes and Consequences*. As the proofs came one day, I found that some of the significant passages regarding sufis were missing from the composition by the printing press. I picked up the typed copy, and saw that those passages had been crossed out with red pencil. I turned to Shri Malkani, and asked him if he had done it. He would not look me in the eyes, but muttered, "We have to live with them." I observed, "I was also trying to see that they learn to live with us." He did not reply.

Shri Malkani was sacked soon after. I do not know the whole story. All I came to know much later was that his failure to stop me from writing regularly in the *Organiser* was one of the reasons for the sorry outcome. But at that time I did not suspect it that I had something to do with his departure from a weekly which he had served for so many years, so much so that the *Organiser* had come to mean Malkani and Malkani the *Organiser*. The ways of party bosses are always inscrutable.

Shri V.P. Bhatia who took over as the next editor turned out to be as fine a gentleman as Shri Malkani. But what could he do in the face of pressure from the politicians? He did not cross out passages from my articles. But he did drop broad hints that my articles were no more wanted. I have a thick skull when it comes to picking up hints. Even so I understood that something had gone wrong somewhere. I told Shri Bhatia that I would stop as soon my current series, *Perversion of India's Political Parlance*, came to an end. I did. But I wanted to know what had happened.

After a few months, I ran into a big boss of the RSS. I had been told that he had something to do with the ban on my writings. I asked him straight, "Why have you stopped my series in the *Organiser*?" He said, "*kabhi kabhi likhiye* (write once in a while)." The cat came out of the bag when I chanced to meet another big boss of the RSS after a few months. He was on his way to attend a Vishva Hindu Parishad rally in the USA. As I put the question to him, he pointed his finger at me, and barked, "You ... you go out and attack Islam. How will then any Muslim come to us?" His tone was sharp. In fact, there was a touch of temper in his voice. I had met him earlier, once or twice, and thought that he was politeness personified. Now I was meeting a different man — the big boss of the Hindu movement. Even so, I asked him, "But do you really want the Muslims to come to you?" He started, "As a strategy..." I did not care to hear him any further, and walked out of his room. I had been sick of this word "strategy" ever since I turned away from Communism. I had seen this word strewn like autumn leaves in Marxist-Leninist literature. In any case, there was no room for complaint, now that I knew the party line put forward. The only thing that was not quite clear to me was the RSS-BJP clamour that the secularist parties were pampering the Muslims for cornering their votes. To me it looked like another case of the kettle calling the pot black.

I have never bothered about party bosses or moneybags, having seen quite a few of them from close quarters. They are lured by power

or lucre or both, most of the time. Nor have I ever been an aspirant to any privileged position. So I went ahead. I knew that Hindu society was much larger than many RSS-BJP put together. I decided to go to my people with the truth as I saw it. I was open to correction, but not to craftiness glorified as strategy. The response has been rewarding.

I could function this time because I had my own money. A few friends from Delhi, Calcutta, and Madras gave me some more. All I was looking for now was scholars who could tell the truth straight. Fortunately, I met some of them soon — Dr. Harsh Narain, A.K. Chatterjee, Prof. K.S. Lal, Koenraad Elst, Rajendra Singh, Sant R.S. Niral, and Shrikant Talageri. More scholars are sure to join us as time passes. Meanwhile, Girilal Jain, Arun Shourie, Swapan Dasgupta and some others have been keeping the flag flying on their own. Hats off to them

The first problem I faced as a publisher was the Emergency imposed by Islam ever since its advent in India. One has all the freedom to praise Islam, its prophet, its scripture, its heroes, and its "contribution to Indian culture". But one is not free to ask a few questions or present the real facts relating to these very subjects. The Vedas, the Epics, the Purāṇas, and every other book which Hindus hail as holy can be discussed, even denounced. So also every Hindu God and Goddess, every Hindu hero, every Hindu tradition, and every Hindu social institution. But saying that Muhammad was not the last prophet, that the Quran is not the final revelation, and that Islam is not the only true religion continues to cause trouble. Such statements invited death penalty so long as Islam had a monopoly of military power in this country. After that, they have been inviting clauses of the law code, and street riots if the law happens to be negligent once in a while.

It was not long before I was visited by officers of the Crimes Department, and not only from Delhi. I was accused of causing "communal discord", and threatening the peace of the land. I was arrested, and ordered to seek bail. The Station House Officer in Delhi who locked me up for twenty-four hours, was mighty pleased with his performance. He boasted loudly that he had prevented a big street riot in Delhi. He invited me to accompany him and see for myself the missiles which the local Muslims had piled up on the roofs of their houses, apart from the firearms inside. When I asked him why he had not got the missiles removed and the firearms flushed out, he snarled, "Address your question to the big bosses of the political parties. I am only a small fry trying to earn my daily bread."

I had been arrested in the classic case of Ram Swarup's

documented study, *Understanding Islam through Hadis: Religious Faith or Fanaticism?* This book had been published in the USA in 1982, thanks to the efforts of Shri Arvind Ghosh of Houston, Texas. VOICE OF INDIA had brought out an Indian reprint in 1983. There had been loud talk in the book market at Delhi that this book was going to be banned. I had waited with bated breath. But nothing had happened for two years. So I had got it translated into Hindi, and sent the printed sheets of two thousand copies to the binder. A Muslim mob had materialized outside the binder's shop, and threatened to burn down the establishment. The Station House Officer, I have mentioned, had appeared on the scene in a matter of minutes, and carried away all the sheets as well as the binder. In the next few hours I had been picked up.

The Delhi Administration which was under Congress rule at that time, appointed two screening committees, one after another, to examine the Hindi translation and find out if it had departed from the English original, or if the English original itself contained any objectionable matter. Both the committees came to the same conclusion — there was nothing objectionable, either in the English original or in the Hindi translation; both of them had only summarized faithfully an orthodox Islamic scripture. The Delhi Administration sent the case to the Metropolitan Court, and requested that it should be dismissed. But the Jam'at-i-Islāmi weekly, *Radiance*, raised a hue and cry, accusing the author and the publisher of insulting the Prophet. The court waited for some Muslims to appear and show why the case should not be dismissed. No one appeared. So the court dismissed the case on September 28, 1991. But the Delhi Administration issued a notification in November, 1991, stating that the Hindi translation will stand banned whenever it is published. In March 1992, the same Administration banned the English original also. By then the English original had been in circulation for nearly ten years. Meanwhile, two Indian reprints had been sold out. There is a great demand for this book even now. But I remain helpless.

I will close this chapter with my comments on the Ayodhya movement. Ram Swarup had seen in this movement an opportunity to educate the Hindus about the character of Islam. As early as 1983, he had asked me to put my knowledge of history and archaeology to some use, and compile a directory of Hindu temples destroyed by the Islamic invaders and rulers down the centuries. The Muslim monuments which had come up on the sites and/or built with materials of Hindu temples had to be highlighted. I had got busy with source materials which were voluminous and in several languages. It was going to be a big job.

Muslim leaders and Stalinist "historians" were raising a howl about "Hindu chauvinism" when it came to the notice of Arun Shourie, the Chief Editor of the *Indian Express* at that time, that some significant passages had been omitted from the English translation of an Urdu book written long ago by the father of Ali Mian, the famous Muslim theologian from Lucknow. He wrote an article, *Hideaway Communalism*, in the *Indian Express* of February 5, 1989 pointing out how the passages regarding destruction of Hindu temples and building of mosques on their sites at Delhi, Jaunpur, Kanauj, Etawah, Ayodhya, Varanasi and Mathura had been dropped from the English translation published by Ali Mian himself. This was a new and dramatic departure from the norm observed so far by the prestigious press. Publishing anything which said that Islam was less than sublime had been taboo for a long time. I was pleasantly surprised, and named Arun Shourie as the Gorbachov of India. He had thrown open the windows and let in fresh breeze in a house full of the stinking garbage of stale slogans.

I was still more surprised when he invited me to document for his paper what I knew on the subject. I had tried to get into the prestigious press again and again with documented articles on Communism, Islam, and Christianity, but had given up after being rebuffed every time. The big press, I had been told, was meant for respectable writers. I had kept a tally of the respectable tribe. I had discovered that most of them were the Big Liars about the Soviet Union, Red China, India's history, Hindu society and culture, and "the achievements of Islam and Christianity in this country". The most successful among these worthies were the professional Hindu-baiters. They pocketed the fattest cheques for heaping filth on everything Hindu, and that too in a press owned by Hindu moneybags.

I promised to Arun Shourie that I would send an article very soon. He asked me to write more than one and cover the subject adequately. So I wrote three articles, fully documented from unimpeachable Islamic sources, and showing that destroying other people's places of worship was a favourite pastime of practically all Muslim rulers in medieval times, and a pious performance in Islam after the precedent had been set by the Prophet himself. The first article was published on February 19, 1989. It was illustrated with facsimiles of six Islamic inscriptions saying that Allah and the Prophet had blessed the pulling down of Hindu temples and the raising of mosques in their places, mostly with their materials.

Arun Shourie had shown great courage. But he had counted

without the secularist crowd which had access to the owner of the *Indian Express*. He told me on the phone that there was some trouble brewing. I have never talked to him about the nature of the trouble, and do not know if my articles had anything to do with his ouster from the *Indian Express* next year. All I know is that he had to slow down the publication of my next two articles. They were to appear in the weeks following February, 19. Actually they appeared on April 16 and May 21.

Meanwhile, the Ayodhya movement had gathered momentum after the 1989 General Elections in which the BJP achieved spectacular success. It was in December, 1989 that a Belgian young man, Koenraad Elst, dropped in at my office. He had picked up a copy of my book, *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters*, from some bookshop, and had become keen to see me after reading it. We discussed the character of what was being described as Hindu awakening. I gave him some of VOICE OF INDIA publications, and he went away to Ayodhya and Varanasi. When he returned after two weeks he expressed surprise that he had not been able to locate a single book presenting the Hindu case on Ayodhya. I told him that in late 1983 a VHP leader had collared me after a seminar, and asked if I had any proof that a temple existed where the Babri mosque stood at present. I had expected the VHP to produce some literature during the six years that had passed since then. Koenraad Elst was, however, aware that Dr. Harsh Narain and A.K. Chatterjee had come out with positive proofs in the meanwhile. I then took him to Ram Swarup, as I do in the case of everybody who comes to me and shows sympathy for Hindu causes. On the eve of his departure, Koenraad Elst asked me if I would publish a book on Ayodhya which he planned to write on his return to Belgium, I did not take him seriously. I did not know at that time that the thirty-one years old Belgian we had met was a prodigy, and that he felt so deeply about Hindus having a good case but presenting it very badly.

The script of his *Ram Janmabhoomi Vs. Babri Masjid: A Case Study in Hindu-Muslim Conflict*, was dropped on my table by the postman exactly after a month. I could not stop after I started reading it. I took it to Ram Swarup the same evening. He read it during the night and rang me up next morning. Koenraad Elst's book, he said, should be published immediately.

I had just published a book, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them*, Volume I, *A Preliminary Survey*. It carried the articles by Arun Shourie, Dr. Harsh Narain, Ram Swarup, and myself, published in the

Indian Express. Two articles which Jay Dubashi had written in the *Organiser* on the significance of the Shilanyasa at Ayodhya simultaneously with the fall of the Berlin Wall were added to it. I also wrote a new chapter, Let the Mute Witnesses Speak, for this book. This chapter carried a list of around two thousand Muslim monuments which, according to literary and/or archaeological evidence stood on the sites of Hindu temples and/or had Hindu sculptures embedded in their masonry. The location of these Muslim monuments was also indicated in the list, place-wise, district-wise, and state-wise. The list has now become famous, though it touches only the tip of the iceberg.

Soon after Koenraad Elst's book was also ready, Ram Swarup and I went to Shri L.K. Advani for requesting him to release the two books in a public function. He agreed, though he was not quite keen about the compilation on Hindu temples in general. And he used the public function on 13 August 1990 for announcing that he would try to persuade the VHP to drop their claims on the sites of the Vishvanath Temple at Varanasi and the Krishnajanmabhūmi at Mathura, provided the Muslims agreed to give up the Rāmajanmabhūmi site at Ayodhya. At the same time he chided me for using strong language ("*Sitārāmji tō tikhē hō jātē haiñ*"). I wondered if he had read my articles in the book on temples. A friend who had known and relished my earlier style had chided me for making my style scholarly. The people present were stunned. Girilal Jain who presided over the function minced no words while pointing out that the much-applauded Hindu tolerance was nothing more than Hindu cowardice most of the time. But none of this appeared in the press next morning. It was Advani's offer which became front-page news.

Dr. Harsh Narain and Koenraad Elst had documented how Syed Shahabuddin had kept shifting his ground regarding proof about the destruction of the Rāma Mandir at Ayodhya. But the VHP-BJP combine was more than willing to provide more proofs. In fact, the stronger the proofs the Hindu scholars provided, the greater became the Muslim demand for something more solid. The leaders of the Ayodhya movement had walked into the trap laid by the likes of Shahabuddin in spite of my repeated warnings that Hindus should do the questioning and make the Muslims do the answering. But these leaders were innocents abroad, having no knowledge of Islamic theology or Islamic history. Gross ignorance is quite often the straw to which optimism clings. All this while the Muslim leaders kept looking down upon the Hindu beggars standing before them with folded hands. I was of the

opinion that the building of the new Rāma Mandir could wait till such time as the BJP got a mandate from the people. The first priority, I thought, should go to educating the people about Islam. But by now the Rāma Mandir at Ayodhya had become an end in itself for the VHP-BJP combine. They were prepared to try any number of tricks, tell any number of lies, and suffer any amount of humiliation, only if they could get their toy assembled at Ayodhya.

I need not narrate the rest of the story which is well-known. The leaders of the Ayodhya movement were soon proclaiming from the house-tops that Islam did not permit destruction of other people's places of worship! They took no notice of my book, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them*, Volume II, *The Islamic Evidence*, in which I had quoted from scores of histories, written by pious Muslim historians, to the effect that destroying Hindu temples and replacing them with mosques was a favourite pastime of Muslim rulers down to the fall of the Mughal dynasty. I had also included in this book a chapter, Islamic Theology of Iconoclasm, to prove beyond a shadow of doubt that destroying other people's places of worship was a pious performance in Islam because the Prophet himself had destroyed all pre-Islamic Pagan temples in Arabia. The leaders of the Ayodhya movement were out to flatter Islam in order to coax the Muslims to part voluntarily with the Rāmājanmabhūmi site. They got nowhere.

I have heard people from the Sangh *parivāra* saying quite often that the Congress does not know how to treat the Muslims. They go about telling the Muslims that while the Congress views them only as a vote-bank, the Sangh *parivāra* honours them as human beings and honest Muslims. They are appealing to the Muslims to rally round the BJP flag. I am reminded of a Chinese story. A landlord was in the habit of strangling his wives. Every time he strangled a wife, another woman came forward to marry him. When people told the new ones the number of women he had already strangled, everyone of them replied, "Oh! They didn't understand the old dear." And every one of them got strangled in her own turn.